Art and gentrification: pursuing the urban pastoral in Hoxton, London

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When artists walk through a wilderness in epiphanous "bliss-out", fiddling with polaroids, grim estate agents dog their footsteps. (Iain Sinclair 1991, 21)

Between noon and 8pm on 8 July 1995, the 'Hanging Picnic' took place in Hoxton Square, a small public park in a down-at-heel area of inner London. Twenty-five artists installed work along the black railings that mark the perimeter of the Square, including one piece entitled *Down on the Farm*. The event was organized by a 25-year old cultural impresario, Joshua Compston, owner of a gallery called Factual Nonsense housed in a former timber-yard 200 metres to the south. Dressed in a 'British-India style high-collared white tunic' (Cooper 2000, 146), Compston walked around the event, which he had conceived as an open-air art exhibition, 'curated picnic' and manipulation of the 'social Real', and chatted to the assembled picnickers that had crowded into the Square. These consisted largely of friends and colleagues from the London art scene, many of whom had recently moved to the area, as well as a few curious children and older residents from the predominately social housing immediately to the north. Ice-creams cased in condoms were sold, while nestled up in the trees above, speakers in bird-boxes emitted regular swear words disguised as crow noises.[1]

Walking north towards Hoxton Square in July 2010, I pass several upmarket residential buildings, bars and restaurants, many housed in converted nineteenth century industrial premises. They include a fashion boutique called Child of the Jago, which opened in 2007 styling itself as 'the destitute and illegitimate progeny of a hopelessly rundown

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[1] These details are taken from a 25 minute 1995 documentary film on the Hanging Picnic event entitled 'Opening Shot' produced by London Weekend Television and directed by Liz Friend.

environment'[2]. It takes its name from the title of an 1896 novel by Arthur Morrison that depicted life in the 'the old Jago', a notoriously violent and crime-ridden area in inner London during the late nineteenth-century. I reach the corner of Hoxton Street and Old Street and enter a bar and music venue called the Old Electricity Showrooms, named after the previous use of this building, once relied upon by many local residents to pay their electricity bills[3]. The refurbished interior resembles a dishevelled country house, with butterfly cases, salvaged paintings of rural landscapes, still-lives and Victorian gentlemen, and a globe and model ship above the bar. On my way home, I pass another venue called the Hoxton Pony, see several adverts for *House and Garden* magazine and a book entitled *Arcadia* prominently displayed in the window of an art bookshop.

This paper explores the relationship between artistic practices and performances, such as those of the 'Hanging Picnic', and new cultural landscapes of gentrification. Academic and popular accounts have widely recognised that artists frequently operate as precursors and agents of gentrification processes[4]. Yet gentrification scholars, with important exceptions such as Jager (1986), Deutsche (1996), Bowler and McBurney (1991) and Moran (2007), have largely failed to incorporate cultural landscapes and histories and aesthetic registers into their analyses[5]. Instead there has been an emphasis on conceptual

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[2] http://www.achildofthejago.com/about/ Accessed 17 July 2010
[3] 'In Richard Rogers and Mark Fisher's (1992, 130) description of Hoxton from 1992, they state how 'Incomes are low; unemployment is high; health standards are poor . . . In winter heating is a major problem . . . Disconnections for non-payment are above average and have risen since the local Electricity Board closed its showroom in Hoxton Street in 1987.'
[4] For a selection of accounts by writers, scholars and journalists over the last forty years, see Tom Wolfe (1975), Sharon Zukin (1982) and *The Economist* (2000). See also Mathews (2010) for a useful review of the academic literature exploring the changing relationship between art and gentrification.
[5] Daniels (2006, 32-35) on English Pop art, Ley (2003) on assemblage art and Deutsche and Ryan (1984) on neoexpressionism also recognise the significance of particular artistic practices and forms in gentrification processes.

frameworks and terminology drawn from political economy, sociology and economic geography. Although this has generated important and productive schema such an 'artistic mode of production' (Zukin 1989), a 'field of gentrification' (Ley 2003) and 'neobohemia' (Lloyd 2006), there is also a need to engage with readings of social and political change found in art theory and cultural studies. This paper contends that it is through these that new and often disregarded class-based relations of power that characterise gentrification – the 'production of urban space for progressively more affluent users' (Hackworth 2002, 815) – can be identified, and begin to be challenged.

In this pursuit of an alternative conceptualisation of the relationship between art and gentrification, the paper adopts and adapts the British art critic and writer Julian Stallabrass's (1999) use of the 'urban pastoral' in his book *High Art Lite*. Notions of the 'pastoral' have traditionally been rooted in poetic depictions and artistic representations of idealized rural settings and characters (Alpers 1996). They commonly portray bucolic scenes featuring wholesome and contented shepherds, peasants or agricultural labourers working, resting or frolicking in Arcadian landscapes (Cafritz *et al.* 1988). Bringing together an implied high viewer/reader and virtuous low subject, and as the British literary critic William Empson (1974, 22) argues 'putting the complex into the simple', this creates a seeming victory of universal human values over the usual snobbery that surrounds class and social relations. However, these representations of rural life were frequently created for a more socially and economically advantaged audience, often those that employed or extracted rent from these 'low' subjects (Williams 1973). As the literary scholar John Barrell (1980, 5) suggests, 'the labouring, the vagrant, and the mendicant

poor were portrayed so as to be an acceptable part of the *décor* of the drawing rooms of the polite, when in their own persons they would have been unlikely to gain admission even to the kitchens.' For Empson (1974), the pastoral is not necessarily simply a question of rural subject matter but is an *attitude* and a perspective on social relations.

Stallabrass (1999, 237-257), drawing on Empson and the North American art historian Thomas Crow (1996), argues that this outlook and attitude embodied in the pastoral is now most prevalent within urban settings. Focusing on the so-called 'young British artists' (yBas) in 1990s London, Stallabrass suggests that pastoral fantasies and portrayals are no longer to be found in simple yet virtuous representations of rural life, but in the everyday artefacts and abjection of working-class life – now almost exclusively located in urban surroundings. As he argues,

> A little edge, just the right amount, is energising, and is necessary to spark off pastoral fantasy: simple rural folk enjoying rustic pleasures have become replaced by the characters of the inner city, similarly devoted in middle-class fantasy to the joys of politically incorrect humour, the circulation of obscenities, the joys of violence, crime and vandalism, carefree sexual encounters and drug-taking. (1999, 246)

This 'cultural celebration of urban debasement' for detached sophisticates, Stallabrass posits, is 'closely connected' with gentrification (1999, 247).

Stallabrass, however, does not consider in depth the dynamics to contemporary processes of urbanisation and gentrification. Nor does he explore particular histories, geographies and landscapes of London, and the ironic allusions to the rural 'gentry' of eighteenth-

century England made by Ruth Glass in her coining of the term 'gentrification' in 1964. This parallels much of the gentrification literature where there has been a tendency to reduce capital interests to a single voice, and ignore the complexities of competing and often contradictory factions located in specific places (O'Connor 1998; Lees 2000). Similarly, a more textured and nuanced understanding is required of artistic practice, recognising not only the hegemony of the cultural industry but also critical counter-practices situated in gentrifying areas (Bowler and McBurney 1991).

[Figures 1 and 2 about here]

This paper is therefore deliberately rooted in the specifics of a particular neighbourhood. It focuses on the area of Hoxton[6], located a couple of kilometres to the north of the City of London in the London Borough of Hackney (see Figures 1 and 2). Hoxton developed a reputation during the 1990s through events such as the Hanging Picnic outlined above as the centre-point and playground for the yBa movement that Stallabrass documents. But during this period it also transformed from a down-at-heel and marginalised district into a highly desirable residential and commercial location (Rickey 2000). As such it has frequently been cited as an important example of the role of artists in recent urban change (see, for example, Hubbard 2006, 219-227). Yet, there have been no sustained empirical accounts of Hoxton's transformation, beyond the perspective of cultural regeneration

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[6] Traditionally Hoxton has been defined by Kingsland Road in the east, Regents Canal in the north, Old Street and City Road in the south, and Shepherdess Walk in the west. As this paper explores, however, since the mid-1990s 'Hoxton' has also come to encompass the triangle to the south created by Great Eastern Street, Shoreditch High Street and Old Street, previously regarded as part of Shoreditch. For purposes of simplicity, the paper will use 'Hoxton' to refer both to its traditional boundaries, location for a large swathe of social housing, and this triangular area to the south, where much of the new artistic activity and property redevelopment of the last two decades has been concentrated.

policy-making (Attfield 1998), the computer modelling of gentrification processes

(O'Sullivan 2000, ch.11) and the formation of 'neo-industrial' inner-city precincts

(Hutton 2008, 106-114; Pratt 2009).

This paper will begin by sketching some of the reasons an agglomeration of artists

developed in Hoxton during the early 1990s. In the second section I will outline how

these artists pursued urban pastoral practices and imaginaries as part of efforts to assert

their status and reputation as cultural producers. Thirdly, I investigate how these practices

and imaginaries helped encourage and facilitate Hoxton's gentrification. In so doing I

consider not only existing examples and models of art-related gentrification, but also

emphasise the important role of the pastoral in the production and re-imagining of urban

space for more affluent social groups[7].

Hoxton's artistic blooms

The emergence of Hoxton as an artistic centre during the 1990s would not have occurred

without the widespread deindustrialisation of inner London during the 1980s. During this

period there was a loss of an estimated 65% of manufacturing employment (Graham and

Spence 1997, 464) with the amount of occupied industrial floorspace in Hoxton declining

by 14% between 1978 and 1983, leaving almost 23% of industrial property lying vacant

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[7] The paper draws on periods of research undertaken between 2001 and 2010. This involved 25 semi-structured interviews with artists, gallery owners, property developers, planners, estate agents, community leaders and residents. Information was also collected from a number of different secondary sources, including gallery, newspaper and planning archives, property promotional material, and demographic and socio-economic surveys. This was used to verify and cross-check statements in the interview material and to provide historical and contextual background information. Another important element to the research was the use of a field-diary to record observations, impressions and informal conversations on regular visits to Hoxton.

(*Hackney Borough Plan* 1984, ch.8, 2). This was despite the Labour-run local authority's

planning policies and grant allocations from the Greater London Council (GLC), both

designed to encourage industrial uses of the area and match job opportunities with the

skills of local residents. By 1986 Colin Amery (1986, 21), writing in the *Financial Times*,

described the area as 'desperately derelict'.

It was this availability of disused warehouses and former workshops close to the centre of

London that spurred the first significant influx of visual artists and other creative

specialists into the area (Green 2001). Mick Kerr for example moved to Charlotte Road

in 1981, where with two fellow art-school graduates he converted the top floor of a four-

storey building:

> The industry collapsed and in the early part of the 1980s if you were prepared to
> take on a nine year lease you could get accommodation here, it was really run-down
> . . . it was very dead. (interview 2004)

It was not only artists who recycled Hoxton's disused and centrally-located light

industrial property during the early 1980s. A group of fashion designers were similarly

attracted to the area by its large, cheap spaces, as well as by its connections with the East

End textile trade. With graphic designers such as Jamie Reed (who worked with the Sex

Pistols) and musicians such as John Foxx (founder of the group Ultravox) also living and

working in the area, Hoxton began to establish a reputation for new non-mainstream

forms of cultural life (Hoare 1994).

But Hoxton's incipient artistic bloom during the 1980s also resulted importantly from wider cultural and political shifts, often neglected in accounts of the 'organic' emergence of new creative quarters. There was a more than threefold increase in private art galleries and dealers nationally between 1960 and 1985, and an accompanying expansion in British art education from the 1960s (King 1990, 137). In 1968, the Conservative-led GLC helped meet increased demand for studio space from this larger pool of art graduates by supporting an organisation called SPACE in their creation of a new artists' 'colony' in St Katherine's Dock next to Tower Bridge – a project which also received funding assistance from the bankers Kleinwort Benson (Green 1999, 28-29). SPACE, alongside ACME, established in 1972, recycled a growing supply of obsolete buildings in East London for artistic use, including New Hoxton Workshops and Rufus Street Studios in Hoxton in the late 1980s (MacRitchie 1992; Green 2001, 70). Throughout a period when reinvestment in parts of inner London was financially risky, this public and private-sector support was crucial for artists looking to take advantage of deindustrialised spaces in the city. This paralleled the role of Improvement Grants, introduced in 1968, in the gentrification of run-down Georgian and Victorian housing in areas such as Islington (Hamnett 1973).

Hoxton's abandoned light industrial built stock offered not only cheap accommodation but provided space, and inspiration, for new larger and internationally-orientated forms of painting, sculpture and installation work (Tapper 1969; Wedd *et al.* 2001, 138-154). One of the first artists to recycle an empty industrial building in London was Richard Smith, part of the British 'pop' art movement, who moved to Bath Street on the borders of

Hoxton in 1961 (Mellor 1993, 54). Richard Smith's choice of this then highly unorthodox location for an art studio was motivated by an earlier stay in New York, where the recycling of old industrial spaces had been pioneered during the 1950s by artists such as Robert Rauschenberg. Likewise, Peter Ind founded the Bass Clef jazz club in a derelict building on Hoxton Square in 1983, inspired by his experiences living and working in New York's loft scene. In recreating many of the cultural practices and spatial arrangements of Manhattan-style 'loft living', artists were beginning to disseminate knowledge in London about the rules and rituals of a new form of gentrification.

However it was not until the 1990s that Hoxton's artistic scene fully flourished. Following the property crash of the early 1990s, many landlords offered artists cheap rents to live and work semi-legally in spaces once earmarked for commercial redevelopment. A new group of art graduates, including Gary Hume, Sarah Lucas and Fiona Rae, moved to vacant property on Hoxton Square and in the triangle of land just south of Old Street (see Figure 2). They were joined by photographers, writers and designers, and by Joshua Compston, who moved into a former timber yard and French-polishers on Charlotte Road in October 1992, where he opened the area's first permanent gallery, Factual Nonsense. Comprising a group of between fifty to sixty individuals, many of whom had known each other at the Royal College of Art and Goldsmiths College, a strong area-based social and support network became established, focused on the Bricklayers' pub at the crossroads of Charlotte Road and Rivington Street.

Unlike other deindustrialised areas close to the City of London such as Clerkenwell and Bankside which did not experience a similar influx of artists during the recession of the early 1990s (Hamnett and Whitelegg 2005), there were several factors that favoured the emergence of this new creative urban milieu in Hoxton. As a designer who moved to the area in 1983 comments:

> It already had the credentials, the legacy, if you like, of the first period [during the 1980s]; there were lots of warehouse parties, lots of impromptu galleries, lots of art shows, so it was already established as an area. (interview 2004)

The cluster of disused Victorian warehouses and workshops around Old Street, Great Eastern Street and Shoreditch High Street provided the ideal setting for nurturing a new close-knit creative scene. One artist who lived on Charlotte Road between 1991 and 1997 remembers:

> It was a forgotten part, four roads of a given area where you could leave your doors open, where in the weekends it was absolutely dead so you could have this kind of community thing going on, and I can't think where else you could get that in London. (interview 2004)

The editorial to the first edition of a magazine, *The Ditch*, created in 1994 as 'a sort of village noticeboard or town crier' to celebrate and support the neighbourhood proclaimed:

> The artistic and creative spirit that has flourished here before [in the 1980s]. . . is once again flowering on a diet of opportunity, enthusiasm and cheap floor space . . . We are here because we love the area, we love the quality of the buildings, and by chance we have discovered a community here. (*The Ditch* 1994 Issue 1, 3)

This artistic community was much more visible than the group that arrived during the 1980s, whom the estate agent James Goff remembers 'as very introverted, very shy, very artistic, they liked the area but they weren't proud of it. . . . They weren't saying this is the place to be' (interview 2004). During the 1990s, both the area and idea of Hoxton became a significant artistic launching-pad and calling-card.

Urban pastoral in Hoxton

The group of artists that moved to Hoxton during the early 1990s not only benefited from its cheap rents, isolated central location and large spaces. The area, with no previous strong association with visual arts, provided an opportunity for these individuals to forge a new niche as cultural producers, and advertise themselves to London's network of dealers, collectors and critics (While 2003; Harris 2011). Such a strategy had become increasingly vital in the context of an art market recession during the early 1990s that meant gallery dealerships were harder to come by. At the same time, a Thatcherite exposure of publicly-funded art institutions to market forces, and a concurrent incorporation of business education into fine art courses, notably at Goldsmiths, meant young artists had become markedly more proficient at adopting entrepreneurial strategies (Wu 2002; McRobbie 2002, 520-521). Locations such as Hoxton offered a new socio-spatial identity for aspiring artists to package themselves as exciting and alternative, and distinguish themselves against more traditional, conservative art centres in London such as the West End (Garnett 1998).

It was in this cultural appropriation and marketing of Hoxton, that a number of urban pastoral themes and fantasies were pursued and explored. First, urban pastoral was

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exploited in terms of the area's postindustrial degradation and its objects and images

'associated with the less advantaged sections of society' (Stallabrass 1999, 237). A

delight in Hoxton's vernacular environment during the early to mid 1990s can be

discerned in much of the art-work produced in and around the area. Many artists

attempted to emulate and directly fuse their subject matter with the forms and values of

inner-city mass culture (Roberts 1996; Muir 2009). Most notably, Sarah Lucas, while

living and working in Hoxton Square, created lists of working-class slang, over-sized

montages using tabloid newspapers, and sculpture pieces featuring kebabs, cigarettes,

toilets and cars with smashed windscreens (see Figure 3). In the words of her fellow artist

and Hoxton resident Angus Fairhurst (1996, 43), her work was 'smutty, . . . down the

fruit'n'veg stall,. . . a bunch of blokes in the pub and it knows it's not polite' (see also

Collings 2002, 94-105). During this period Lucas produced a piece with Tracey Emin in

nearby Bethnal Green, *The Shop* (1993), 'a second hand store packed with soiled and

browned furniture' that according to the art historian Amna Malik (2009, 16)

demonstrates 'how much the street space of London's East End informed Lucas's work

during the mid 1990s'.

[Figure 3 about here]

In bringing the urban world of the low subject to a high art context, artists such as Sarah

Lucas followed aspects of the model for urban pastoral set by the artist duo Gilbert and

George (Bracewell 2004). Living close by to Hoxton in Spitalfields since 1968, Gilbert

and George had repeatedly engaged with the inner-city environment by featuring

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photographs of urban dirt and dereliction, skinheads and graffiti in their work. Their daily walk through the neighbourhood as 'posh herdsmen' in matching country formal outfits further emphasised and played with this pastoral role (Sinclair 1999, 17).

Crucially, it was the particular social geography of Hoxton that made it easier to indulge in urban pastoral pursuits. Artists' live-work spaces were predominately located in former light industrial spaces around Hoxton Square and the triangle further south formed by Old Street, Great Eastern Street and Shoreditch High Street (see Figure 2). Hoxton's less affluent communities remained in a stretch of the area further north filled predominantly with blocks of post-war social housing. As a policeman who used to walk Hoxton's streets during the early 1990s remembers:

> It was all very segment-ised: you had the estates [to the north] . . . which were very much like they were ten to twenty years before. You had this bit in the middle which was in decline with empty spaces where the artists liked to go. Then the City bit, they kept themselves to themselves as well, they wouldn't tend to go north . . . at one point Great Eastern Street was just like a barrier, you wouldn't get City people going to any bars or pubs, or really anything north of Great Eastern Street. . . . Then you wouldn't really get the local people coming south of where they were, other than people who might be coming to steal things! . . . So it was all each bit for their own. (interview 2004)

Safely enclosed in their cluster of disused buildings, the artistic community in the south generally avoided visiting and interacting with the parts of Hoxton to the north. In contrast to areas of New York such as the Bronx during the 1970s, Hoxton provided in Stallabrass's (1999, 245-246, original emphasis) terms, an opportune environment to 'spark off pastoral fantasy', as the convenient separation between practitioners of the urban pastoral and the characters of the urban poor provided 'inner city fabric' that was

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'full of incident' and with 'a little edge' yet 'not *that* unsafe' and 'not overly ghettoised or dangerous.'

Secondly, the urban pastoral in Hoxton involved not only this appropriation of working-class socio-cultural practices, albeit at a distance, but working-class socio-spatial formations located in the imagined past. With its roots in classical mythology, pastoral has traditionally been associated with myths of the Golden Age and lost innocence (Loughrey 1984). Much of the cultural work of early 1990s Hoxton was similarly fed by a focus on lost forms of idealised community. As the artist Gavin Turk remembers:

> We were quite aware and, I wouldn't say it was ironic, but certainly there was a kind of sense of how can we take advantage of this . . . Pearly Kings and Queens, Bow Bells kind-of Cockney knees-up type of thing, which did sort of linger in the air, whether it was really conscious or not, I don't know, but it was definitely . . . easy to tap into that kind of route (interview 2004).

Similarly, writer and Hoxton resident Philip Hoare (1994, 7) described the area in 1994 as containing 'quaint remnants of an idyllic East End past.' Indeed for many, the solidarity and shared identity that had developed between those who had 'discovered' this area during the early 1990s resembled that of working-class groups found to the north of Hoxton Square – depicted in sociological accounts such as Harrison (1983, 29) as one of the few places in Hackney that was 'still largely inhabited by Cockneys' and 'where some networks of community and kinship survive'. As one artist who lived in the area between 1992 and 1999 suggests, 'it was maybe a stance to say "we're East End artists, we're in an East End industrial community, [and] we've got an authenticity"' (interview 2004).

This form of urban pastoral came to the fore in the conceptual art festivals organized in

Hoxton between 1993-1995 by the charismatic and eccentric cultural impresario Joshua

Compston. Combining music, food and a wide range of entertainment, Compston's

festivals mined an East End working-class tradition for street parties and revelry. This

tradition was especially identified with Hoxton. The area was closely associated with the

popular form of British entertainment known as Music Hall, which flourished in London

between the 1890s and 1940s. The annual street fairs between 1993 and 1995 were, in

part, a romanticised attempt to return to this mythical socio-cultural milieu of pre-War

Hoxton. As Compston himself stated on being asked about his art events, 'what I want to

achieve is more in tune with the life of working-class communities a hundred years ago'

(quoted in Barklem 1995).

[Figure 4 about here]

Compston staged his first festival on the crossroads of Charlotte Road and Rivington

Street in July 1993, which he dubbed the 'Fete Worse than Death' (FWTD). Taking

advantage of the area's deserted streets, he rented stalls for a nominal sum to artists,

many of whom lived locally (Figure 4). Highlights of the fete, attended by approximately

a hundred people, included Gavin Turk using a piece of industrial tubing and a sock to

run a 'Bash a Rat' game, and Damien Hirst, dressed as a clown, making his first

trademark spin paintings before exposing his painted genitals for 50p. Following the

success of this first event, Compston held another much larger Fete Worse than Death,

attended by four thousand people, the following summer in 1994, and a further extravaganza he called the 'Hanging Picnic' in July 1995; on both occasions using Hoxton Square rather than the narrow streets outside his gallery. Highlights of the second FWTD, expanded to include music, theatre and circus performances, included Tracey Emin's 'Rodent Roulette' and Leigh Bowery's 'birth' to a naked gold-painted woman live on stage. By combining the practices of the archetypal British country fair or village fete, together with an East End working-class tradition for street parties, this was a clear instance of how pastoral themes had been transferred to a contemporary urban setting. Indeed, the 'Hanging Picnic' event not only parodied the outdoor railing galleries along the north side of Green Park in central London, but played on common picnicking scenes from British pastoral paintings and poetry, with a picnic committee formed especially for the event to ensure 'historical principles.'

This pursuit and development of urban pastoral aesthetics reaped increasing attention. By the Hanging Picnic of 1995, Compston had become highly successful at generating media exposure, persuading London Weekend Television to make a half-hour documentary on the event and *The Guardian's* Weekend Magazine to devote seven pages to the area's artistic community (*LWT* 1995; Gott 1995). As the yBas gained increasing national, and international, coverage and notoriety, their association with Hoxton was often noted. For example, the *Sensation* exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1997, in many ways the high-water mark of the yBa era, was described as showing the 'Hoxton Square lot' (*The Observer* 1997). Hoxton's sudden prominence as the epicentre for a new brash, populist British art movement meant that the area, especially in the context of a new media narrative of 'cool Britannia', acquired a distinct cachet (Rickey 1996; Wavell 1996;

Waters 1996). Compston's outdoor events had worked, in his words, as a way of 'shaping and mythologizing the area' and promoting it as 'a funky, upbeat up-and-coming cultural zone' (*LWT* 1995, 23).

Urban pastoral and the gentrification of Hoxton

From the mid-1990s, the transformation of Hoxton's cultural image and the creation of a 'neobohemia' in the area was accompanied by new forms of postindustrial urban economic development. Hoxton became what Thomas Hutton (2005) terms 'a signifying new economy precinct' with clusters of leading-edge 'new media' and creative services industries (O'Sullivan 2002). Institutionally-funded property companies began to exploit the market for residential conversions and 'loft-style' living. Numerous bars, clubs and restaurants opened, catering both to new residents and an increasing number of night-time visitors. Overall, in sharp contrast to the start of the 1990s, when there had been only limited demand for residential or commercial property in the area, by the end of the decade Hoxton had begun to rival not only other formerly industrial City fringe districts such as Clerkenwell, but heavily gentrified districts such as Islington in price and profile (Rickey 2000).

Even without the widespread media coverage heralding its new brand of urban 'cool', Hoxton during the late 1990s, being centrally located, historically devalorised and lacking pro-industrial planning restrictions of the 1980s, was always primed to enjoy extensive reinvestment, and undergo what Loretta Lees (2000, 390) describes as 'post-recession gentrification'. Nevertheless, the new cultural landscape instigated through the

urban pastoral played a significant role in shaping and facilitating the rapid and dramatic transformation of Hoxton.

Firstly, new looks and codes were produced by aestheticising objects, practices and histories in Hoxton associated with popular culture and working-class abjection through the urban pastoral. This demonstration of what Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 5) suggests is 'the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even "common"' distinguished Hoxton's artists within the established structures of the British art 'field' (Grenfell and Hardy 2003). By deploying the large amount of 'incorporated' cultural capital they had acquired at art school, particularly theoretical teaching on the role of the 'popular', these artists were able to create new value in Hoxton despite possessing only limited stocks of economic capital. But by creating this new cultural capital in the context of new postindustrial growth in London, they also made Hoxton increasingly attractive to designers, new media companies and large galleries seeking to identify with and market the 'shabby chic' associated with the area. A local property developer, resident in the area during the 1990s, outlines the stages this process took:

> First of all [it is] the properly creative, non-earning community, i.e. artists proper who move in. Then it is individuals, companies . . . that are actually involved in applied arts if you like, commercial arts. Then architects come in, then people who work in other sort of businesses start moving in who want to be associated with the creative buzz. And then you get photocopier salesmen the same as everywhere else. (interview 2004).

The outcome of new interest in the neighbourhood was, as Hutton (2008, 107-108) suggests, to introduce 'a harsher competitive edge to the struggle for space in the Hoxton area' and 'provided a more affluent clientele for the area's burgeoning property market

players'. By the late 1990s, most of Hoxton's artists, aside from those who were lease-holders, found themselves possessing insufficient economic capital to remain as residents in the area they had helped 'revive' (*The Observer* 2001; Williams-Akoto 2005).

This relationship corresponds with Ley's (2003, 2540) conceptualisation, derived from Bourdieu (1984 1993) of a 'field of gentrification' in which cultural capital developed by artists through their valorisation of the mundane through the aesthetic disposition is appropriated by market forces – with the subsequent 'displacement of artists to cheaper districts'. Nevertheless, Hoxton also complicates and contradicts Ley's schema. Artists in Hoxton were not necessarily, as Ley (2003, 2530) assumes, 'disdainful of the market system and its commodification that dumbs down the creative act into the language of filthy lucre.' Although adopting anti-conformist dispositions, many artists in Hoxton, in particular Damien Hirst, actively acknowledged and courted the market system. Nor, as Ley suggests (2003, 2535), was the mass market deemed 'sterile' and not 'symbolically rich' enough for the 'aesthetic disposition'. Work produced and shown in Hoxton during the early 1990s included representations of markets, shopping malls and high-streets. Furthermore, whereas Ley (2003, 2541) argues artists are detached from the 'societal valorisation of the cultural competencies of the artist', many artists in Hoxton during the 1990s actively attempted to use media coverage to valorise the 'field' of the urban pastoral they were developing. By marketing and promoting their urban pastoral aesthetic as a new 'brand', artists helped bring about, inadvertinently or otherwise, not only the gentrification of Hoxton but also what Michael Bracewell (2002, 145) terms the 'gentrification of the avant-garde'.

From the perspective of property developers, Hoxton similarly complicates Ley's (2003, 2530) suggestion that 'the intentionalities of the artist and the entrepreneur seem to move in opposite directions.' Artists and developers in Hoxton were not necessarily located antipathetically on Bourdieu's (1984) social space diagrams. Several individuals who originally arrived in Hoxton as art-school graduates became property developers, using their social networks to rent out spaces which were considered too economically risky at the time by mainstream property companies. As one former sculptor and graduate of the Royal College of Art explains, buildings in Hoxton were 'very inexpensive and high yielding in the early 1990s' (interview 2001). These artists-turned-developers also played a significant role in supporting Joshua Compston's outdoor events, with a local estate agent sponsoring Compston's Hanging Picnic in 1995. This proved, as the company's founder recollects, 'very important as a catalyst for the area' (interview 2003). By the end of the 1990s, despite the departure of nearly all of the area's visual artists and the death of Compston aged 26 in 1996, new property companies operating in the area were still emphasising Hoxton's artistic cachet. Promotional material in 2001 for a new-build residential development at 14-15 Hoxton Square depicted Hoxton as the 'chosen home of many of London's "Brit art" celebrities'. City Lofts' Drysdale Street development similarly declared in 2002 that Hoxton has 'the largest proportion of working artists of anywhere in Europe'. These exaggerated claims show how the aesthetic boundaries of Hoxton – the specific 'metropolitan habitus' – have been produced as much by property developers as by artists. They demonstrate how efforts have increasingly been made to harness the perceived possibilities for art and artists in processes of gentrification, or to

maintain what Vanessa Mathews (2008, 2854) calls the 'imageability factor of art districts' even after artists have been displaced from a gentrified area.

As well as creating, alongside property interests, new forms of 'cultural capital', the activities of artists in Hoxton can also be understood as instigating, to use Zukin's (1989) term, a new 'artistic mode of production'. Recognising what Attfield (1998, 136) suggests was a 'sense of bohemian culture arising in the area', approximately £1 million of grants were given through the central government funded Dalston City Challenge between 1992 and 1997. These were specifically channelled to organisations and private investors willing to develop Hoxton's stock of derelict buildings and disused land for 'cultural uses', part of a widespread emphasis in UK urban policy during the 1990s on culture-led forms of regeneration (Miles and Paddison 2005). These grants were also designed to use Hoxton as a way of sparking 'a chain reaction of wealth creation' from the City of London into the deprived borough of Hackney (Dalston City Challenge Action Plan 1992, 14). Although supporting examples of socially diverse cultural spaces such as the Blue Note Club, this state-sponsored remaking of Hoxton as a new creative zone orientated towards the City means that the area's art-led gentrification can be conceived, following Smith (1996) as an important way of 'taming' the area for new cycles of capitalist accumulation.

Nevertheless, the complexities revealed by Hoxton also disrupt these more Marxist understandings of art-related gentrification – developed primarily in relation to New York. In their article critiquing the East Village art 'phenomenon' of the early 1980s,

Deutsche and Ryan (1984, 93) suggest that this 'brave new art scene' was used by the city, which owned 60% of the area's property, 'to dislodge a largely redundant working-class community by wresting control of neighbourhood property and housing and turning it over to real-estate developers'. In contrast, Hoxton's artistic bloom of the early 1990s was not accompanied by significant direct residential displacement of working-class communities. Artistic activity was concentrated in the former light industrial spaces of south Hoxton and, despite a few residences bought under the right-to-buy legislation of the 1980s transferring to middle-class owners, the stretch of housing to the north of Hoxton Square has remained predominantly publicly-owned with security of tenancy. According to the 2001 UK Census, 58.4% of households in 'north Hoxton' continue to rent from the council.

Hoxton's transformation has also contrasted to the art-led reshaping of SoHo's socio-economic landscape detailed by Sharon Zukin. She argues that the rise in artists' use of industrial 'lofts' in downtown Manhattan meant that these spaces could 'no longer be used as machine shops, printing plants, dress factories, or die-cutting operations' paving the way for a 'middle-class return to the city center' (1989, 3). In Hoxton, however, the impact of deindustrialisation largely predated the main wave of artists arriving in the early 1990s, and some industrial activities have remained such as button manufacturers, printing and specialised tailoring. These businesses may even be amenable to displacement pressures. Andy Pratt (2009, 1052) surmises that 'the narrative of "commercial or industrial gentrification" may not be one of forcing out, but willing flight'.

This lack of evidence of direct residential or commercial displacement suggests that describing Hoxton's transformation since the early 1990s as 'gentrification', following Ruth Glass's (1964) original formulation, is potentially misleading. This is the argument made by Martin Boddy (2007, 102) in relation to central Bristol, where, as in Hoxton, there has been new-build development on 'vacant and derelict sites and the conversion of formerly nonresidential premises into residential use'. Similarly, an emphasis on social segregation in gentrification literature (see, for example, Atkinson 2004) is challenged by a frequent celebration in Hoxton of objects, practices and histories associated with marginalised social groups. This seeming divergence from the negative hallmarks of gentrification processes means that it is perhaps not surprising that Hoxton, at least initially, was heralded as a successful example of inner-city reinvestment and social mixing. As the journalist Simon Jenkins (2000, 13) declared in an article on Hoxton from 2000, 'employment is rising and locals are not being forced out'.

Yet, despite its differences to existing examples and models of art-related gentrification, Hoxton shares crucial similarities with other gentrified districts in the production and re-imagining of urban space for more affluent social groups. The area's transformation through the urban pastoral since the early 1990s demonstrates how gentrification – even without direct displacement – remains, as Glass (1964) originally emphasised, a class-based process of neighbourhood change.

Firstly, the pastoral practiced in 1990s Hoxton was, in William Empson's (1974, 6) phrase, 'about' the people but 'not "by" or "for"' them. Although often engaging with everyday objects and cultural practices, as part of a deliberate effort to unselfconsciously affirm categories and pleasures of the 'popular', artists in Hoxton rarely directly engaged with the material conditions of the area's population or offered self-reflexive considerations of the role of art in Hoxton's gentrification (although see BANK 2000). Sarah Lucas's work, for example, often played with feminist motifs and understandings, but rarely explored different class dimensions to the representation of gender. Artistic production was also largely geared to attracting the attention of leading dealers such as the advertising executive, Charles Saatchi, and buyers from international City corporations, such as Deutsche Bank (Windsor 1998). Even at Compston's three major outdoor art events, specifically designed as an interchange between 'high' arts and Hoxton's local community, the attendance and participation was largely drawn from friends and acquaintances of the artists involved. This disavowal of the social and political relations of the area meant that the urban pastoral created a new cultural landscape that – like accompanying property development – acted to capture and assert control over spaces, symbols and objects previously associated with Hoxton.

Moreover, the practices of the urban pastoral depended on a position of social power. As Stallabrass (1999, 256) argues, following Clement Greenberg (1986), adherents of pastoral 'are people who are out of tune with the surface values of the establishment, [but] they are also confident that the establishment will protect them in their dissidence'. This applied not only to many members of Hoxton's artistic community in the early

1990s[8] but in particular to new gentrifiers in the late 1990s who could enjoy the area's downgraded yet aestheticised landscape safe in the knowledge they could leave. The satirical local fanzine *The Shoreditch Twat* (2000, issue 10) identified a post-1998 group in Hoxton as 'the invasion of the Marylebone Tunnelers' – highlighting how they could always retrace their route, if necessary, back to more upmarket areas of central London.[9]

As well as exerting control and demonstrating social power over the landscape of contemporary inner-city London, Hoxton's gentrification has involved the appropriation and manipulation of the area's complex social and cultural histories. In recycling Hoxton's pre-War industrial built forms and re-creating its localised cluster of socio-economic networks, many individuals harked back to the supposed milieu and 'community' ethos of the working-class groups previously associated with these spaces. This focus on Hoxton's socio-cultural historical practices contrasts with a usual emphasis by gentrifiers on architectural heritage and the artefactual past in the remaking and revaluing of an inner-city area (Jager 1986). In nearby Spitalfields, for example, incoming middle-class groups passionately sought to restore and conserve the remaining Georgian built fabric and reinstate 'period' street fixtures (Jacobs 1999). However, as with artistic production in Hoxton largely failing to register the contemporary social and political relations of inner London, the projection through the urban pastoral of a historicised image of Hoxton has lacked an engagement with alternative and oppositional formations that potentially could challenge the cultural rebranding of the area. These, as the writer Iain Sinclair (1999, 17) notes, include 'memory traces of … madhouses,

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[8] As the grandson of a vice admiral, and son of a judge, Joshua Compston enjoyed more leeway than most for his excursions into urban pastoral.

[9] Marylebone is an affluent residential area in the London Borough of Westminster.

priories, holy wells, [and] 19th-century radicalism'. They also include increasingly forgotten histories of municipal politics and technological achievements in the provision of public services (Mander 1996). Instead the re-imagining of the area as a Cockney 'knees-up' and part of a 'jolly' and quaint historical East End has helped to temper the realities of Hoxton's stark and growing socio-spatial and political divisions.

This pastoral focus on an authentic, 'happy-go-lucky' yet historicised working class in Hoxton has also played into a long-term association of the area with a homogenous version of 'white Britishness'. Indeed, for many years Hoxton was a bastion for the National Front, with their headquarters located on Great Eastern Street and rallies held until the early 1980s in Hoxton Square. This perception of Hoxton as a resolutely white British locality arguably helped facilitate its association with the yBas. As the acronym suggests, these artists pursued self-conscious themes associated with British culture in their work (Stallabrass 1999, ch.8). But they were also nearly all white, heterosexual[10] and despite shared concerns with issues of everyday urban life in early 1990s inner London, largely veered away from the radical politics of black British artists such as John Akomfrah and Sonia Boyce. It is instructive that at the first FWTD in 1993, the stewards in their black T-shirts and red Factual Nonsense logos – the FN reversing the NF of the National Front – were mistaken by locals for members of the British Nazi Party (Cooper 2000, 185). It is likely that other parts of East London with more heterogeneous populations and potentially competing place-based imaginaries, such as that of

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[10] Gregor Muir (2009, 171) resident in Hoxton during the mid-1990s and self-styled as the 'embedded journalist' of the yBas suggests that 'unlike New York, where many artists were openly gay, those associated with YBA were deeply heterosexual.'

'Banglatown' around Brick Lane, would have proved less conducive for a yBa makeover (Keith 2005). Hoxton instead provided a convenient stage and prime site for gentrification through its location in multi-ethnic inner-city London yet with an apparent disconnection from the complexities and class-based divisions of London's multiculture. As Tim Butler (2003, 2469) comments, London's gentrifiers, 'despite long rhetorical flourishes in favour of multiculturalism and diversity, huddle together into essentially White settlements in the inner city'.

One effect of this manipulation and downplaying of the class-related and race-based histories and geographies of Hoxton has been to revive aspects of its pre-industrial character. The contemporary gentrified Hoxton of new-build luxury residences occupied by City and media professionals corresponds with the area's status prior to the nineteenth century as a fashionable residential suburb for City merchants and bankers, European dignitaries – and members of the gentry (Coombs 1974; Lasocki 1995). Accordingly, as Compston's fetes hinted, the focus for the pastoral in Hoxton has begun to shift from inner-city postindustrial landscapes to more traditional bucolic themes and what Michael Moorcock (2004 [1988], 378) in his novel *Mother London* calls 'rural blight' and 'Arcadian spread'. For example, in September 2006 the Hoxton Hotel opened, styling itself as 'where urban living meets country lodge lounging'. In January 2009 a new restaurant *Albion* launched with stools made from tractor seats. These have fed into and reactivated middle-class desires for what Hoskins and Tallon (2004) depict as an 'urban idyll' that deliberately draws on idealised imaginaries of rural life seemingly removed

from the complexities of contemporary Britain[11]. Yet by imposing this new pastoral

vision on an area with industrial architectural remnants, pronounced socio-spatial divides

and a shabby and distinctly urban environment, it is as if Hoxton has not been reborn or

even undergone regeneration – but sucked dry.

Conclusions

This paper has argued that in order to identify new and important relations of power in

the changing landscapes of contemporary cities, gentrification research needs to use

analytical concepts found in art history and cultural studies that share a concern for class-

based processes of social and political change. It has explored how the artistic practice

and performance of what Stallabrass identifies as the 'urban pastoral' not only created

new types of easily assimilated cultural capital in 1990s London but helped naturalise

new forms of socio-spatial division by co-opting and manipulating particular objects,

spaces and histories. Urban pastoral sensibilities and visions have thus acted to downplay

and neuter some of the 'dark side' to London's gentrification (Barrell 1980).

As well as attempting to stimulate new cross-disciplinary dialogue within gentrification

research, this paper has also sought to highlight how the specificity of art-led

gentrification can often be lost in conceptualisations and theoretical models of the

process. For example, although Stallabrass (1999, 246) emphasises how London's inner-

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[11] It seems the focus for pastoral practices and fantasies in Hoxton has also shifted over the last ten years of widespread gentrification from the characters and artifacts of London's inner-city to the urban poor of the global 'South'. This is evidenced by the opening of the 'Favela Shop' and the 'Favela Chic' bar and the slum-like installation *Spirit and Matter* by Damián Ortega in Hoxton Square during autumn 2004. As Von Borries and Böttger (2007, 138) speculate, 'the attractive investment projects of the future might no longer be inspired by English villages, but rather, the architecture of slums and shanty-towns.'

city has the particular socio-spatial configuration necessary for contemporary pastoral pursuits, he does not consider the operation of the urban pastoral in relation to the particular histories and geographies of key districts such as Hoxton, writing instead of the 'relative homogeneity of London's areas' in their 'comparative uniformity of decay.' The paper also argued that Bourdieu's (1984 1993) conceptual vocabulary, developed in relation to extensive sociological surveys of 1960s France, does not necessarily uncover particular nuances in the relationship between culture and capital in art-led gentrification. Similarly, neo-Marxist analyses of New York, which emphasise processes of direct displacement, can obscure and under-theorise more culturally and temporally complex class-based 'dis-placement' pressures (Davidson 2008).

The paper also raises issues around artists' sensitivity to the social and political realities of place, and how they can often be caught, intentionally or otherwise, in processes of gentrification with important social consequences[12]. There is a widespread assumption, especially with conceptual art produced in contemporary capitalist societies, that art practice is disconnected from wider political and economic concerns (Groys 2008). This failure to reflect critically on the commodification and implicit ideological agenda of artistic production and consumption is a charge Stallabrass (1999) clearly levels at the yBas. But again it has also been the product of a lack of sustained engagement between art historians, cultural practitioners and geographers in examining art-related social and spatial urban change – including processes of gentrification.

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[12] New forms of 'street art' in London, for instance, labelled 'post-graffiti', have involved the manipulation of previously marginalised spaces and cultural histories, including those of Hoxton, by mainly art-school educated, white middle-class males, with a keen promotional savvy and little political critical reflection on the practices involved and the audiences served (Dickens 2009).

Art and artists nevertheless offer important ways of highlighting the contradictions inherent in pastoral pursuits, and contesting the cultural and political parameters for gentrification (see, for example, Deutsche 1996, 159-192 on Hans Haacke). There are possibilities for humour and parody in disorientating and denaturalising uses of pastoral attitudes in artistic practice, as evidenced by the idiosyncratic tendencies of the London Psychogeographical Association, active in inner London at the same time as the yBas during the early to mid-1990s (Bonnett 2009). There is also art practice that, unlike the urban pastoral of 1990s Hoxton, attempts to engage self-consciously with the lives and histories of ordinary people. Melanie Manchot's 2009 exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, *Celebration,* details the rich tradition of street parties in the East End, yet unlike Compston's fetes and picnics involves members of the public sharing their experiences and becoming a component part of the project. Moreover, there are ways of developing more critical forms of nostalgia that directly contrast with yBas' play with idealised and historicised notions of the working-class East End. Laura Oldfield Ford, for example, in her 2009 exhibition at the Hales Gallery in Hoxton, *2013, Drifting Through the Ruins*, attempts to reactivate more conflictual architectural, political and aesthetic strategies that have been largely erased by the widespread gentrification of London since the 1970s. Artistic interventions such as these offer an important and neglected resource for complicating, disrupting and re-visioning understandings of urban change (see also Pinder 2008). It is through these more critical cultural reframings of social and political urban relations, especially in the context of periods of economic downturn, that potential

new waves of gentrification in cities such as London can begin to be refigured and

resisted.

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