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**‘Comics on the Main Street of Culture’: Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell’s *From Hell* (1999),
Laura Oldfield Ford’s *Savage Messiah* (2011), and the politics of gentrification**

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Abstract

Through a comparative discussion of Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell’s *From Hell* (serialized 1989–96, collected 1999), which is now widely marketed as a ‘graphic novel’, and Laura Oldfield Ford’s more self-consciously subcultural zine, *Savage Messiah* (serialized 2005 to 2009, collected 2011), this article explores the correlation between the gentrification of the comics form and the urban gentrification of city space – especially that of East London, which is depicted in both of these sequential art forms. The article emphasizes that both these urban and cultural landscapes are being dramatically reshaped by the commodification and subsequent marketization of their subcultural or marginalized spaces, before exploring the extent to which this process neutralizes their subversive qualities and limits democratic access to them. In conclusion, however, the article demonstrates that comics artists tend to collect their ephemeral comics and publish them as marketable graphic novels *not* to commodify them, nor to maximize their profits. Rather, they do so in order to reach a wider readership and thereby to mobilize their subversive, anti-gentrification political content more effectively, constituting radical urban subcultures that resist the reshaping of London into a segregated and discriminatory cityscape.

Keywords

comics

the graphic novel

zines

DIY culture

London

gentrification

‘Comics on the Main Street of Culture’: The gentrification of cultural and urban space

I got the catalog from Random House and it's full of regular books. It's great! Instead of being in previews, I'm in this book with regular books. I thought, 'At last here we are in the main street, we're not on some crummy side street, we're on the main street.' There I was. On the inside they had all the colour covers of their books for this half-year and there we were in between *The Natural Guide to Better Breastfeeding* and *The Dog Owner's Guide*: the main street of culture. (Campbell 2004)

In 2004, Eddie Campbell thus reflected on the canonization of his book-length comic, *From Hell*, co-authored with writer Alan Moore, serialized from 1989–96, and collected in book form in 1999. Though historically viewed as ‘marginalized’, ‘low’ or ‘crude’, almost always ‘subcultural’ and sometimes even ‘childish’, comics such as *From Hell* were complicating this association. Praised by critics and reviewers for tackling more ‘serious’ issues and themes, and for drawing on a range of experimental literary and artistic techniques, comics have in subsequent decades found a new audience and taken on a new physical shape. The year 1992 signalled a significant cultural shift when Art Spiegelman won the Pulitzer Prize for his long-form comic, *Maus* (serialized 1980–91). Along with this newfound attention for comics, the term ‘graphic novel’ is increasingly used to describe a ‘longer and more artful version of the comic book’ that is ‘bound as a “real” book’ (Schwarz 2006: 58). However, the graphic novel ‘not only jettisoned the serial format’, writes Thomas Stubblefield, ‘but also enjoyed high-quality printing (and correlative high prices)’ (2015: 153). Printed and bound as glossy books rather than ephemeral, serialized magazines, comics have become widely marketable, produced by mainstream publishing houses and found in high street – or as Campbell comments, ‘main street’ – bookshops. This article turns on a resulting tension:

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though expanding comics' readership numerically, the 'high prices' of graphic novels and the rejection of traditions of ephemerality and serialization might be seen as a formal commodification of the radical legacies and subversive content of these comics.

The re-branding of comics as 'graphic novels' makes them more palatable to mainstream adult readerships, academics and institutions such as universities by (at least ostensibly) sanitizing their coarser elements and emphasizing their literary ones. As early as 1985, comics practitioner and theorist Will Eisner, who described his own collection *A Contract with God* (1978) as a graphic novel, claimed that the term brought 'a new horizon' into 'sharp focus' for comics artists (1986: 141). Eisner suggested that 'the attraction [...] of a more sophisticated audience lies in the hands of serious comic book artists' creating a new 'body of literature that concerns itself with the examination of human experience' (1986: 141–42). This emphasis on the literary – and thus 'high' cultural – content is rooted in the term *graphic novel*, and has helped to legitimize numerous longer comics as worthy of academic and critical study and reach a notably middle-class readership. Indeed, if comics scholars have for a long time been scattered across different departments in universities, whilst comics studies have remained mostly subsidiary to other established disciplines at this institutional level, the last decade has witnessed a surge in the appearance of comics on the syllabi of English literature and other courses more frequently than ever before.

Whilst the term 'graphic novel' has undoubtedly enabled this popularization and institutionalization of comics, this has not been unanimously celebrated. For example, Catherine Labio argues that the label serves to strengthen 'the distinction between high and low, major and minor' cultural forms, as selective inclusion reinforces rather than alleviates the 'ghettoisation of works deemed unworthy of critical attention' (Labio 2011: 126). The recurrence of a selection of graphic novels on syllabi and in bookshops results in 'a sad narrowing of the field to a very small and unrepresentative canon' (Labio 2011: 124). Barbara Postema claims that this might even lead to limiting the 'scope of what the comics form can represent or incorporate' in the future (2013: xi), pointing out that this relabelling also suggests that the graphic novel appeared as a form 'without

precedent or tradition', as if originating 'all of a sudden in a vacuum' (Postema 2013: xi). In fact, the graphic novel 'owe[s] its very life' to 'the burgeoning alternative scene, rooted in the underground' comix movements of the United States in the 1960s and 1970s (Hatfield 2005: 25–26). Underground writers and artists prided themselves on their subcultural status, using their cultural marginality to subvert mainstream coverage of controversial political issues, from the Civil Rights Movement to the Vietnam War.

Eddie Campbell describes this canonization process through the evocative urban metaphor that is this article's central concern. Comics were suddenly to be found, he observes, not in the back alleys of the cultural field, circulating only through its overlooked or marginalized spaces, but 'on the *main street* of culture' (Campbell 2004, emphasis added). He re-emphasizes this metaphor in his later work, *ALEC: The Years Have Pants* (Campbell 2009). There, as Øystein Sjøstad observes, Campbell explores the 'the place of comics in the system of the arts [...] wherein comics are bitterly looked upon as a side street to real Art and the comic book artist as a lesser master compared to the "real" artist' (2015: 2). 'The map of the history of Art is', Campbell writes in an opening panel, 'like any other map. There are main roads and side streets', beneath which he sketches a gridded, inner city roadmap. 'But there are also backyards, middens, coal bunkers', he continues, 'artisans so minor that their names will never be retrieved from the debris in the vacant lot' (Campbell 2010: 250). Here, in Campbell's accompanying drawing a railway track bears down on cramped, unkept backyards, conveying the claustrophobia of underdeveloped urban spaces.

Campbell uses the city's developed and undeveloped spaces as a metaphor to explain the cultural field and literary marketplace, opening up the two central and interrelated critical concerns of this article. Critical accounts of the rise of the 'graphic novel' repeatedly use the term 'gentrification', usually used to describe uneven urban development, to make sense of the evolution of a cultural form. Katalin Orbán points out that 'an important part of the recent history of graphic narrative has been its gentrification, its partial absorption into the category of the literary along with the appropriate prestigious forms of production and circulation' (2015: 123). This partial

absorption, though accommodating selected works onto the cultural ‘main street’, leaves others to the wayside, as Labio warns (2011: 124). Similarly, Charles Hatfield observes that because comics have emerged historically ‘out of a marginalised subculture’, the selective mainstreaming of the graphic novel place artists in an awkward bind. Comics’ tradition of outraging ‘bourgeois society’ has historically been in part so effective because they do so ‘from a gutter-level position of economic hopelessness and (paradoxically) unchecked artistic freedom’ (Hatfield 2005: xi-xii). The slow canonization of comics thus produces in writers and artists concerns about ‘status anxiety and an earnest bidding for gentrification’, as comics creators try both to maintain their subcultural status whilst also garnering the critical recognition their work undoubtedly deserves (Hatfield 2005: xii).

Here a tension emerges between comics’ history as an anti-hegemonic subcultural practice and the more recent assimilation of the form into a mainstream, or ‘gentrified’, cultural canon. Certainly, artists are attracted by the prospect of reaching larger readerships, and in some cases this furthers the reach of the subversive content their work contains. However, by transforming cheaply produced comics into expensive graphic novels, this readership inevitably becomes more economically homogeneous, the cultural product less accessible to certain demographics. The overarching danger resides in the extent to which the marketability and canonization of certain graphic novels over others might actually dictate the themes and issues that future comics address, pushing politically subversive comics economically and culturally to the wayside.

ⁱ With this in mind, it would appear that the comics form is, with admittedly varying patterns of uneven and unequal development, becoming gentrified.

Through a comparative discussion of Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell’s *From Hell*, which is now widely marketed as a ‘graphic novel’, and Laura Oldfield Ford’s zine, *Savage Messiah* (published serially from 2005 to 2009 and then in book form in 2011), I want to explore this correlation between the gentrification of the comics form and the urban gentrification of the city spaces these comics depict. I refer here to urban gentrification as a specific ‘kind of uneven development endemic to capitalist societies’, one that involves the privatization and ‘rehabilitation

of old and degraded neighbourhoods’ by relegating racial minorities and working class communities ‘further into the periphery or, for the very poorest, into the insalubrious interstices of the city’ (Smith 2005: xiii; Tissot 2015: 1–2). Of particular concern for this article is the gentrification of London, especially as it took hold in the East Docklands from the 1980s through to the 2012 Olympics. This is not only because the London Docklands ‘is an extreme and famous example’ of gentrification (Graham 2004: 43–44). The gentrification of this urban area is also a recurrent preoccupation of both *From Hell* and *Savage Messiah*.

Gentrification ‘moved steadily north-east into Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Walthamstow’ during the Thatcherite 1980s, and the twenty-first century has witnessed an ““onward and upward” phenomenon of renewed gentrification’ increasingly shaped by international economic forces and global sporting events, of which London 2012 Olympics is a case in point (Butler and Robson 2003: 9). Though promoted as ‘a scheme that would deliver substantial regeneration benefits for deprived neighbourhoods near to the Park’ (Owens 2012: 215), the accompanying privatization of social housing and public spaces all too often undemocratically overlooked, if not outright removed, these poorer areas. Implemented systematically through ‘top-down delivery arrangements’, urban development for the Olympics disrupted the ‘pre-existing institutional fabric for planning and regeneration in the area, including the relationship between communities and stakeholders, decision-making processes and project delivery’ (Owens 2012: 215, 221). Meanwhile, the development of ‘out-of-town shopping centres’ such as Westfield London – the ‘architectural signature of Thatcherism’ – leads to the privatization of ‘the streets, squares and open spaces of the city’ (Minton 2012: 15). Security infrastructures proliferate, transforming the city into ‘a divided landscape of privately owned, disconnected, high security, gated enclaves side by side with enclaves of poverty which remain untouched by the wealth around them’ (Minton 2012: xii). As Anna Minton concludes, these ‘highly visible differences create a climate of fear and growing mistrust between people’, leading to ‘stark segregation’, undemocratic urban privatization, and the general erosion of ‘civil society’ (2012: xii).

How might these processes of urban gentrification and securitization be related to the gentrification of the comics form? Comics ‘are inseparably tied to the notion of the “city”’, through methods of production and circulation, but also their form and content (Ahrens and Meteling 2010: 4–5). Dan Hassler-Forest has shown that the ‘figure of the superhero is inextricably interwoven with the landscape and architecture of the modern city’ (2012: 113), whilst Eisner’s *A Contract with God*, the first self-identified ‘graphic novel’, depicts the urban development and gentrification of a particular tenement block in the Bronx as it changes through time. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon’s *Watchmen* (serialized 1986 to 1987, collected in 1987), which has been canonized ‘alongside the first volume of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*’, is similarly preoccupied with urban development (Owen 2015: n.pag.; see also Gray 2010: 31). The titular watchmen are ‘possessed by a personally driven vigilantism’ (Prince 2011: 815), united through their gentrifying efforts to eradicate ‘organised crime in the inner urban areas’ by clearing ‘the streets’ with ‘riot gas’ and ‘rubber bullets’ (Moore and Gibbons 2014: 72, 58).

Indeed, this link between comics and urban space ‘can be found within the cityscape itself [as] combinations of words and images in the form of signage and graffiti’ (Ahrens and Meteling 2010: 6). André Suhr even argues that the ‘very diverse impressions from a walk through the city’, viewed through the frames of ‘[w]indows, openings, doorways, street entrances’, is ‘similar to making sense of a comic’s sequential panels’ (2010: 241–42) – we read the city as we read the comic. Consequently, then, *From Hell* not only uses the frame of the comic to portray London, but to meta-visually map its unevenly developed urban spaces. The comic asks its readers to compare and contrast the phallic buildings and monuments of London’s late-imperial, Masonic architecture (the comic is set in the late nineteenth century) with its side streets and marginalized spaces. It is no coincidence, I want to argue, that it is this part of London’s geography that has been violently reshaped by processes of gentrification since the 1980s through to the early 2000s, the period during which *From Hell* was written, drawn and published. Identifying the inter-textual and inter-

visual links between *From Hell* and *Savage Messiah*, the latter of which is more explicit in its anti-gentrification politics, further foregrounds such a reading.

Clearly, the metaphorical comparison between urban gentrification and what I have described here as the gentrification of the comics form has its limitations. It is not my intention to dismiss the importance of the term ‘graphic novel’. This label has gained comics much-deserved cultural recognition and encouraged formal innovation and generic experimentation. Neither do I wish to overlook the numerous politically subversive cultural works that self-identify as ‘graphic novels’. Rather, I want to emphasize that both these urban and cultural landscapes are being dramatically reshaped by the commodification and subsequent marketization of their subcultural or marginalized spaces. The extent to which this neutralizes the subversive qualities of – and limits democratic access to – these spaces, will be uneven and incomplete, patchy and partial, but it remains an overriding tendency. The metaphorical link between urban and cultural gentrification hinges, furthermore, on the preoccupation of the comics form with the representation of city spaces. In conclusion, however, this article demonstrates that comics artists tend to collect their ephemeral comics and publish them as marketable graphic novels *not* to commodify them, nor to maximize their profits. Rather, they do so in order to reach a wider readership and thereby to mobilize their subversive political content more effectively. For *From Hell* and *Savage Messiah*, I will argue, these subversive politics are repeatedly oriented against the ‘accumulation by dispossession’ of which urban gentrification is a symptom (Harvey 2009: 326).

The elusive metropolis: Resisting neo-liberal gentrification in *From Hell*

From Hell replicates the grid of the city through the nine-panel, gridded page of the comic. However, even as it documents the imperialist and masculinist project of its ‘Jack-the-Ripper’ protagonist, William Gull, in this way, the comic's visual juxtaposition of London's unevenly developed spaces also initiates trajectories of resistance to this patriarchal urban planning. In

Chapter Four, Gull, accompanied by his lackey Netley, journeys between significant architectural monuments that pay tribute to late Victorian England's imperial and patriarchal powers as they occur across London, before then plotting them out on a map (see Figure 1). This cartographic document is itself depicted in a single frame, whilst subsequent frames then detail 'Gull's *flâneurial* interaction with the city' (Lukic and Parezanovic 2016: 4). Framing a process of urban mapping and movement within its own highly cartographic project, *From Hell* comments meta-visually on the relationship between comics and the city: as Quiring writes, the comic becomes 'an allegory of its own production, the narrative process drawing the city into itself' (2010: 211). Furthermore, as he moves through the city, Gull espouses a 'psychogeographical theory of urban determinism, in which the city-as-text prescribes rather than describes our actions and emotions' (Ferguson 2009: 57). The various obelisks and spires that Gull identifies are symbolically phallic, certainly, but they are often also objects plundered from the empire's various colonies, re-erected in the imperial metropolis. Gull's vision of the city is built around a hyper-masculinist and proto-imperialist architecture that, according to his ideological manifesto, function as its material foundation stones. For Gull, this ideological order can be reproduced through the layout of the city, as he adheres to a version of what Edward Soja would call the 'socio-spatial dialectic', which emphasizes the 'mutually influential and formative relation between the social and spatial dimensions of human life' (2010: 4).

<<insert fig. 1 here>>

Figure 1: Gull and Netley plot their route through London on a map in Chapter Four of *From Hell*; reproduced with permission of the artist and publisher.

However, as Christine Ferguson argues, this interrelationship between societal and spatial fabric might also suggest a 'model of resistance politics' (2009: 57). The comic's multi-layered, spatial form depicts parts of the city that elude Gull's preferred architectural coordinates. If urban

space conditions social behaviour, a philosophy to which Gull himself is committed, these underdeveloped spaces point to alternate, if not actively resistant, social activity. As Gull comments in the chapter's opening pages: 'take this CITY, in itself a great work, you'll agree: a thing of MANY LEVELS and COMPLEXITIES' (Moore and Campbell 1999: Chapter 4, 6).ⁱⁱ Though Gull intends to 'penetrate [London's] metaphors, lay bare its structure and thus come at last upon its meaning' (Moore and Campbell 1999: 4, 9), he necessarily acknowledges the multiplicity of those structures. Throughout *From Hell*, the city eludes the patriarchal and imperial agenda embedded in the rational, gridded planning of his maps. This elusiveness is given aesthetic shape by Campbell's visuals. Drawn in sketchy, indistinct lines, Campbell depicts what Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe might call 'an elusive metropolis', global cities that 'always outpace the capacity of analysts to name them' (2008: 25).ⁱⁱⁱ The comic's depiction of the city's backwaters, side alleys and undeveloped spaces, as well as Campbell's hand drawn maps in *From Hell*'s appendices, emphasizes this elusiveness (see Figures 2 and 3). The shape of the city often emerges through clusters of nebulous lines, formally resisting Gull's rational mapping project to represent, fix and control London's multi-layered architecture and heterogeneous spaces.

<<insert fig. 2 here>>

Figure 2: Eddie Campbell draws London's side streets and back alleys in indistinct, nebulous lines throughout *From Hell*; reproduced with permission of the artist and publisher.

<<insert fig. 3 here>>

Figure 3: Campbell's detailed hand drawn maps of the city of London, which are included as appendices to the comic; reproduced with permission of the artist and publisher.

The inclusion of these spaces, which elude Gull's hegemonic architectural paradigm, are linked explicitly to the urban gentrification of East London that began in the 1980s. Through the

ritualistic murder of innocent women, Gull suddenly finds himself transported from nineteenth-century London's dilapidated urban spaces to the rigid, modernist architectures that will dominate those same spaces at the end of the twentieth century. In these moments, Campbell's nebulous aesthetics 'harden into the clean, straight lines of technical drawings' (Quiring 2010: 209), as *From Hell*'s nine-panel gridded sequence is suddenly interrupted. Gull's climactic vision of a skyscraper in late twentieth-century London commands an entire page of the comic (Moore and Campbell 1999: 8, 40, see Figure 4), resulting, as Rikke Platz Cortsen observes, in the disruption of the comic's temporality (2014: 398). This temporal disjuncture infuses the comic's depiction of the uneven development of nineteenth-century London with allegorical meaning, suggesting a subtextual political commentary on the urban rejuvenation through gentrification carried out during the 1980s. As Elizabeth Ho remarks, 'Campbell's graphics of twentieth-century Thatcherite "enterprise culture" serves to mirror Thatcher's economic restructuring of the welfare state that created both "an age of popular capitalism" and a "decade of growing inequality"' (2006: 101). *From Hell* draws parallels between the imperial and patriarchal forces shaping Victorian London and the neo-liberal policies that began to re-develop those areas a century later. In so doing, it can also be seen to adopt a resistant anti-Thatcherite and anti-gentrification poise: as Lukic and Parezanovic argue, the comic as a whole reveals the futility of Gull's 'architectural attempts at political utopianism' by emphasizing the 'dividing lines between the poor and wealthy sections' of London (2016: 3), a commentary that can be extended into and onto the sociopolitical present in which Moore and Campbell write.

<<insert fig. 4 here>>

Figure 4: Gull's climactic vision of a skyscraper in late twentieth-century London, which commands an entire page of the comic; reproduced with permission of the artist and publisher.

Focusing on the historicity of *From Hell*, Ho emphasizes not the comic's historical setting, but rather the socio-economic and urban conditions within which it was produced and the ideological moment into which it intervenes. Serialized between 1988 and 1996 and collected in book form in 1999, *From Hell* was coterminous with a surge in the production of 'Ripper narratives', or 'Ripperature'. This cultural explosion also 'coincided with the twinned discourses of Thatcherism and Powellism, both of which attempted to officially recapture, defend, and perform Britain's centrality in the world and Englishness at the home front' (Ho, 2006: 102). For Ho, *From Hell*'s self-reflexivity repositions the comic as 'a deliberate attempt to intervene in such celebratory misreadings of the Victorian', whilst the 'inclusion of the second appendix' in the 1999 publication 'looks back to the Thatcher administration and forward to that of New Labour' (19992006: 102, 107).^{iv} Building on Ho's argument, I suggest that *From Hell*'s political resistance to neo-liberal ideologies and policies of unfettered capitalism in the 1980s and 1990s can be productively viewed through the metaphorical parallels of gentrification as they occur in both the cultural field of comics and the urban environments those comics represent. This is most productively achieved by tracing the inter-textual and inter-visual connections between *From Hell* and Laura Oldfield Ford's *Savage Messiah*, a more self-consciously subcultural comic, or 'zine'. As I will now show, *Savage Messiah* draws on comics' tradition of subversive content to eschew both the gentrifying label of the 'graphic novel' and to actively, and on occasion violently, resist the processes of gentrification still ongoing in East London today.

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Zine cultures: Subcultural form and subversive resistance in *Savage Messiah*

In his 2014 rewriting of Manuel Castells' 1977 text, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*, Andy Merryfield identifies what he calls 'the New Urban Question', which arises in response to the 'spatial apartheid' to be found in cities worldwide. This condition is epitomized in 'a new paradox in which centres and peripheries oppose one another' at close proximity within the urban fabric of

global cities (Merryfield 2014: 30). ‘The two worlds – centre and periphery – exist side-by-side, everywhere’, writes Merryfield, ‘cordoned off from one another, everywhere’, a divided landscape created through the ‘dispossession and reconfiguration of urban space’ (2014: 18, 30). This segmented urban landscape is the physical result of socio-economic policies that began in ‘the Thatcherite and Reaganite 1980s’, were ‘consolidated itself in the late 1990s and early 2000s (especially after 9/11)’, and ‘now, post-2008, has no scruples about raiding urban coffers everywhere’ (Merryfield 2014: 119). Minton grounds Merryfield’s observations in East London’s urban development by charting the ‘incremental privatisation of every aspect of social and so-called “affordable housing”’ that began with Thatcher’s ‘right to buy’ schemes in the 1980s and that intensified throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (2016: n.pag.). Now, Minton continues, ‘[s]ide by side with privately owned places devoted to shopping and city-centre apartment living are enclaves of poverty’ (2012: 131).

Nevertheless, for Merryfield, these spatial proximities not only separate, but also generate new affinities and subcultural networks, creating politically resistant social movements (2014: 83). The production and circulation of politically dissenting comics or ‘zines’, both metaphorically and literally ‘off’ the main streets of culture, are emblematic, I argue, of urban social movements that resist the global city’s spatial discriminations. These zines draw on a historically subcultural practice and explicitly reject mainstream canonization as it manifests in the rise of the ‘graphic novel’ to mobilize more effectively their resistant politics. Zines, Michell Kempson writes, ‘are independent, not-for-profit publications that contain articles, anecdotes and artwork covering a variety of topics’, and ‘are predominantly circulated via subcultural networks’ as a ‘way to exchange information’ (2015: 1081). The notable lack of academic engagement with zine culture is itself indicative of its marginality, which resemble the tradition of ‘alternative comics’, or ‘comix’, as defined by Hatfield – sequential art that is produced, circulated and consumed through ‘underground’ networks, rejecting ‘mainstream comic book publishing’ and often containing subversive cultural and political content (Kempson 2005: ix). Formally, zines employ provocative

and often experimental combinations of text and image, ‘co-mixing’ these two media – which take the form of short textual excerpts, drawn images and photographs – to produce ‘scrapbook’ style material pamphlets and online blogs. What is more, and as Ford’s *Savage Messiah* demonstrates, they are not only produced by artists and writers who mostly live in cities and circulate their work within and through notably urban subcultural networks. They also often represent the different forms of violence to which their creators’ marginalized urban social groups and spaces are subject, using comics’ unique spatial layout to expose the discrimination inscribed into the city’s divided spaces.

Zine producers therefore represent the city before disseminating and circulating those representations back through urban space. As for comics culture, which is frequently comprised of social networks connected through the physical sites of comics shops and conventions, zines are bought, sold and exchanged at ‘zinefests’ or forums, hosted at physical locations within the city. More culturally, politically and socially marginal than mainstream comics or graphic novels, however, ‘zinefests are usually held in social centres, and can be located within the subcultures that develop around political squats and independent DIY [do-it-yourself] communities’ (Kempson 2015: 1085). Indeed, zines and zinefests are often produced and hosted by squatting networks, thereby transforming squats – empty buildings that have been illegally occupied – into ‘places of social empowerment’ (Kempson 2015: 1085–86). In an extension of the metaphor on which this article hinges, the uneven mainstreaming – or gentrification – of cultural production and consumption can quite literally be mapped onto the uneven development of the city’s physical urban environment.

If the marketization of *From Hell* as a ‘graphic novel’ leads it onto the shelves of bookshops located, quite literally, on the city’s ‘main streets’, zines emphasize the subcultural qualities of their content by self-publishing and seeking out readerships that inhabit both the city’s, and comics culture’s, marginalized spaces. Again, this metaphor clearly has its limitations: zines, comics and graphic novels clearly move along a sliding scale of cultural identification. Differing kinds of

sequential art can evolve across and between different cultural zones just as they circulate through the city via different forums, readerships and marketplaces. As I have been suggesting, just because a book is marketed as a 'graphic novel' does not necessarily inhibit its capacity to launch a subversive political commentary on the city that it depicts. The fact that Moore and Campbell's comic actually prefigures the aesthetic projects of several of East London's zine cultures, which draw on Campbell's elusive style and re-channel it back into their own, more self-consciously radical political projects, is testament to this spectrum of (sub)cultural identification. Indeed, *Savage Messiah* itself has been collected and published in book form, thereby gaining wider readerships and moving tentatively onto the 'main street' of culture, even though it has not been marketed as a 'graphic novel' as such. If these shifts trouble *Savage Messiah*'s self-identification as a radically subcultural endeavour, the compromise is made because of the increase in readership that such marketization enables.

Self-published by Ford between 2005 and 2009, each of *Savage Messiah*'s ten issues centres around a different London postcode, threaded together by an ongoing critique of the violent gentrification of the city from the 1980s through to the years leading up to the 2012 Olympics. Whilst zines can focus on any 'range of genres', from 'music, science fiction and comics' to 'personal writing, poetry, artwork and political and cultural analysis' (Cresser et al. 2001: 457), Ford's series draws on almost all of these, mixing them together into experimental collages of text and image. Form is crucial here: the late cultural theorist Mark Fisher, most well-known for his book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, wrote the introduction to the collected edition of *Savage Messiah*. In *Capitalist Realism*, Fisher analysed 'the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it' (2009: 2). Capitalist ideology is deeply imbricated with formal realism, a genre in turn historically bound to the 'novel', as Ian Watt demonstrated long ago: 'Capitalist realism is therefore not a particular type of realism; it is realism in itself' (Fisher 2009: 4). Conversely, Fisher writes, 'dystopian films and novels' use 'the disasters they depicted' as a

‘narrative pretext for the emergence of different ways of living’ (2009: 2). *Savage Messiah* actively disengages from and subverts the tradition of the realist novel to mobilize its resistant – anti-capitalist and anti-gentrification – politics, especially through its depiction of urban space. Its numerous photographic and drawn images of East London’s underdeveloped and often abandoned spaces are refracted through a dystopian aesthetic that rejects the realism of the novel, whilst its combination of mixed media works to fragment that form’s linear narrative. In so doing, it actively rejects the ‘main street’ of culture as it is embodied in the (graphic) novel and positions itself instead in its back alleys and side streets, aligning its subcultural status with the marginalized urban spaces that it depicts.

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Figure 5: A two page spread from Laura Oldfield Ford’s zine, *Savage Messiah*, which combines typescript with tourist map with biro etchings; reproduced with permission of the artist and publisher.

In one of the few academic reviews of *Savage Messiah*, Sandhu Sukhdev observes that ‘the novel is the wrong form’ through which to ‘map the metropolis’ (2013: 6). It is, he continues,

a false container, too tidy – a gentrified landscape in its own right. There are other ways and lapsed lanes which are worth wandering for less exalted but at least as penetrating insights: semi-reputable realms fecund with fugitive textualities and ephemeral outpourings. Flyers, chatboards, billboard graffiti [all] offer clamorous intensities more compelling than the smooth sonorities to be heard in the gated compound of ‘literary London’. (Sandhu 2013: 6)

Again reigniting the parallels between urban and cultural gentrification, Sukhdev praises *Savage Messiah*’s ability to ‘make a virtue and create a politics out of messiness’ by ‘wrenching images

from their original contexts', making 'witty juxtapositions' and reappropriating 'cheerfully cut-and-pasted visuals' (2013: 6). As Sukhdev's description suggests, Ford's zine functions as a kind of 'sequential art' (Eisner 1986: 5). It uses an uneven patchwork of image and text to represent urban London's gentrifying spaces, exploiting the sequential dimension of the form to build alternative narrative trajectories around and through the segregated spaces and security infrastructures it depicts. As Fisher comments, '*Savage Messiah* is a gigantic, unfinished collage, which – like the city – is constantly reconfiguring itself', inviting readers 'to see the contours of another world in the gaps and cracks of an occupied London' (Ford 2011: xi, xv). In this way, Ford's zine explodes the borders imposed by the 'privately owned and privately occupied' urban spaces that began to cut through and divide East London in the years preceding the 2012 Olympics, and that are now 'set to become a permanent part of the landscape' (Minton 2012: xxxiii). Consider this excerpt from *Savage Messiah*'s first issue:

Circle a gated enclave, a confusion of padlocks and blank windows. Infantile 80s pastiche, grotesqueries of riverside developments... [...]

NO ONE LIKES US WE DON'T CARE.

Canary Wharf, arrogant totem. That and a cluster of cap doffing comforters. You look away and it's like mushrooms in a field, they're suddenly there, springing up from nothing.

Masonic henge conjuring medieval Italy. Height and prestige, ruches stashed on the top floor. Enclosed courtyards. Proto gated communities. [...]

Canary Wharf symbolised a failure of 80s values, Olympia and York, receivership and swathes of redundant computer terminals. Now Blair takes Thatcher's project onto new and more audacious levels. (Ford 2011: Issue 1, 11, see Figure

5)

Reproduced as typescript on a piece of scrap paper, Ford's written critique of bordered communities is accentuated by the paper's torn edge – the page's border is quite literally ripped through. The typed text is further interposed with crosses, scratched in biro horizontally across the page, an image that recurs throughout *Savage Messiah's* ten issues to symbolize the city's increasingly divisive urban infrastructure. The multiple etchings of these crosses invokes the nebulous stylistics used by Campbell to represent London's nineteenth-century architecture, whilst the inter-textual relationship with *From Hell* throws the anti-Thatcherite subtext of that comic into fuller relief. The description of the 'enclosed courtyards' and '[p]roto gated communities' as a 'Masonic henge' references the Masonic architecture that Gull uses to impose his masculinist order on and across the city of London. Meanwhile, the obelisks that are also key features of Gull's architectural project are here overlaid onto the 'totems' of Canary Wharf. Just as *From Hell* uses the nineteenth-century city to comment on contemporary forms of urban development, *Savage Messiah* draws on pre-Thatcherite modes of urban living to insert spaces of resistance into East London's increasingly securitized and exclusionary landscape.

Fundamental to the resistant practices of both projects is the spatialized and mixed media form of the comic itself. *Savage Messiah's* layering of drawings, annotated maps, blurry images and angry text, transgresses the borders of literary form *and also* the increasingly rigid borders of the city. The zine juxtaposes tourist leaflets and plans with the impoverished, underdeveloped urban spaces that are smoothed over and ignored by gentrifying cultures. If a proliferation of security infrastructures blocks the city's poorer areas from the view of visiting tourists (and, during the Olympics, the wider global community) as well as residents of East London's gated estates, Ford's zine forces these urban realities and proximal inequalities back into view. Just as Gull's efforts to impose a masculinist order onto London through his mapping of key architectural monuments and ritualistic murders are undermined by the comic's depiction of elusive side streets and back alleys, Ford's zine introduces alternative urban spaces and practices into the tourist maps' sanitized version of the city. Though Canary Wharf's neo-liberal architecture dominates Ford's skyline (just as the

masonic architecture celebrated by Gull once did), she also interposes these architectures with alternative urban spaces that disrupt the maps' ordered representation of it: 'Punk rock blaring from Reef House on the Samuda estate'; 'Sitting down to smoke amidst the detritus of a light blocked living room'; 'Drinking in a beer garden beneath the St Alfege's'; 'Fire of London' (Ford 2011: 11). These accounts reject the neo-liberal culture of Canary Wharf, resisting its ordered vision of the city by introducing grimmer community spaces and subversive practices into its sequential and artistic narrative.

<<insert fig. 6 here>>

Figure 6: Ford's hand drawn and photographed 'great saucer eyes' in *Savage Messiah*; reproduced with permission of the artist and publisher.

'Great Saucer Eyes': Mapping the violence of neo-liberal capital

As for the crosses etched in biro, the image of an eye is similarly recurrent throughout *Savage Messiah* (see Figures 6 and 7). At some points these eyes are photographic reproductions of Ford's own eye; at others they are drawn in ink, Ford's heavy mascara blurred into nebulous lines. On occasion, they are reduced simply to one-line sketches of eyeballs, emanating panoptic rays over the urban landscape. This image, which aesthetically invokes Campbell's drawings, allows Ford to translate Gull's privileged *flâneurism* (he is, after all, a wealthy, white and notably male aristocrat) into a radical commentary on the contemporary gentrification and securitization of East London. This figure of the *flâneur*, critically conceptualized by Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin, roams through the city, allowing 'the intelligentsia' to become 'acquainted with the marketplace' (Benjamin 2002: 21). Though complicit with the commodification of urban space, however, more radical reevaluations of *flâneurism* have shown how as a practice it can also excavate 'the ghosts and residues of previous experience' as well as the 'intimations of the future' that are concealed

within its architectural spaces (Caygill 1998: 118). *Savage Messiah* documents Ford's reinterpretation of *flâneurial* practice, as she rejects its early bourgeois connotations to reignite an anti-capitalist psychogeographical practice. Her reproduction of the eye invokes Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen* prose poem, 'The Eyes of the Poor', in which the cafe – symbolic of nineteenth-century Parisian gentrification – is subject to the longing gaze of an impoverished family:

The eyes of the father were saying: 'How beautiful it is! how beautiful it is! one might say that all of the gold of our poor world is painted on these walls.' – The eyes of the little boy: 'How beautiful it is! how beautiful it is, but this is a house that only grants entry to people who are not like us'. (Baudelaire 1970: 52)

Baudelaire documents the exclusionary shape of late nineteenth-century Paris as it had been restructured by the architect Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann. Haussmann notoriously cut 'a swathe [of wide boulevards] through the cramped and chaotic labyrinth of slum streets in the city centre' – the increased surveillance these open spaces facilitated helped 'the French army crush popular uprisings' and other forms of urban unrest and social protest (Willsher 2016). Ford reconfigures Haussmann's Paris as the archetypal model of gentrification that now grips London, an historically and theoretically well-founded comparison. Geographer David Harvey argues that Haussmann 'helped resolve the capital-surplus disposal problem by setting up a proto-Keynesian system of debt-financed infrastructural urban improvements' (2009: 318), whilst urban theorist Neil Smith has identified Haussmann's urban planning as 'something more akin to contemporary gentrification', driving out the working class to consolidate 'bourgeois control of the city' (2005: 33, 35). Building on this work, Merryfield argues that global cities are currently experiencing processes of 'Neo-Hausmannization', a phase of urban development that 'integrates financial, corporate and state interests, yet tears into the globe and seizes land through forcible slum clearance' (2014: 72–73).

<<insert fig. 7 here>>

Figure 7: A disembodied eye surveys the city and its undeveloped urban spaces in Ford's zine; reproduced with permission of the artist and publisher.

Hausmann's violent re-development of Paris recurs as a historical touchpoint for Ford throughout *Savage Messiah*, as she draws comparisons between that city's re-development and the kinds of infrastructural change shaping twenty-first-century London. Wandering through Camden's 'maze of market stalls', for example, she thinks of 'the inhabitants of the Opera quarter at the time of Hausmann', when '[d]evelopers were accused of corruption and robbery and groups of people were led by exasperation to dream about the return of rifles and barricades' (Ford 2011: Issue 6, 18). Within this longer historical context, Ford's image of the 'eye' can be read as an invocation and amplification of the 'great saucer eyes' of the poor family in Baudelaire's poem. Throughout, *Savage Messiah* adopts the perspective of the urban poor and dispossessed in order to hold state and private actors, whose the hypocritical agendas exacerbate a divided and unequal urban landscape, to account. It is worth emphasizing here the parallels that Merryfield draws between Hausmann's Paris and the neo-Hausmannization of contemporary global cities such as London:

[n]ow, the Baudelairean 'family of eyes' has gone truly global. Those 'great saucer eyes' are media eyes, all seeing, and, with the Internet and WikiLeaks, often all-knowing too, or potentially all-knowing. People can now see the global aristocratic elite along this planetary information and communication boulevard, see them through the windowpanes of neoliberal global-urban life. We might even say that a global family of eyes has the potentiality to encounter itself as a family, as an emerging citizenry, as an affinity group that yearns to repossess what has been dispossessed. [...] Now, there's not so much a world for the working class to win as a whole world for urban citizens to occupy, to reclaim and remake as their *cité*. (2014: 88)

With this in mind, *Savage Messiah*'s inter-textual layering, which translates the written 'eye' of Baudelaire's *flâneurism* into a visual one, launches a critical attack on the re-development of East London by documenting the spaces and practices of the urban poor and dispossessed before asserting their alternative, though often unwritten, identity. Ford reclaims the 'I' behind the 'eye' and inserts it back into the city that it represents, and through which it circulates. The zine itself thus embodies Merrifield's 'global family eyes': *Savage Messiah* can be conceived of as a material loci of 'an affinity group that yearns to repossess what has been dispossessed', smashing the literal and metaphorical 'windowpanes' of Baudelaire's gentrified Parisian cafe and 'neo-liberal global-urban life' more generally (2014: 18). This is then formally enacted through Ford's smashing of the conventional 'windowpanes', or 'frames', of the graphic novel. The erratic compilation of visual and written materials assembled chaotically across the zine's pages mobilizes the gaze of the collectively dispossessed who remain resistant to, and critical of, the privatization of public space that is symptomatic of gentrification in East London.

Conversely, however, the image of the disembodied eyeball functions as a commentary on the proliferation and prevalence of CCTV infrastructure. In so doing, it reveals the social ramifications of proliferating levels of security and diminishing public space. This wider critique, which *Savage Messiah* dramatizes throughout its ten issues, is especially foregrounded when the zine is read through its inter-textual and inter-visual connections with Moore and Campbell's *From Hell*. Lukic and Parezanovic show that because 'Moore and Campbell's London offers itself to various, often contested interpretations', the city 'becomes, despite initial architectural attempts at political utopianism, dominated by the experience of fear' (2016: 3). Indeed, Campbell's nebulous depictions of London's urban backwaters remain, on occasion, almost undecipherable. In *Savage Messiah*, the proliferating development of CCTV, surveillance and other security infrastructures, explicitly designed – as was Gull's utopian project – to make the city *decipherable*, are in this case the object of Ford's political critique. As Ford writes: 'Anxiety levels high before 9-11. There were

checkpoints here already. IRA had a go. Twice. The Tower and the South Quay. 1996, ring of steel around the complex, 100 million pounds worth of damage' (2011: Issue 1, 11). And elsewhere:

Drifting through Dalston is to traverse a network of holding patterns, a city in stasis. [...] We escape surveillance by slipping in and out of bolt holes, dilapidated shops and bombsites. Subverting colonised spaces and master planning strategies we carve out other realms beneath the eye of the CCTV.
(Ford 2011: Issue 7, 7)

In the early twenty-first century, Britain 'has the most CCTV in the world, with more cameras than the rest of Europe put together' (Minton 2012: 47). Though originally justified as a counter-terrorist response to attacks by the IRA in the early 1990s, by the end of that decade these surveillance networks were repeatedly used to kettle and subdue anti-capitalist demonstrations (Coaffee 2004: 289). However, just as Gull's attempt to impose a rationally ordered grid upon the city reveals the futility of that process, security infrastructures tend to have a counter-intuitive effect on the city's inhabitants. As Minton shows, CCTV cameras

remove personal responsibility, undermining our relationship with the surrounding environment and with each other and removing the continual, almost subliminal interaction with strangers which is part of healthy city life. [Meanwhile,] people are left far more frightened when they [*do*] have to confront the unexpected, which can never be entirely removed from daily life. (2012: 33)

The segregationist infrastructures that accompany gentrification have similar social ramifications: the more people inhabit highly securitized city spaces the more their 'fear of difference and fear of strangers' is entrenched (Minton 2012: 173). The image of the eyeball gazing across London's urban spaces invokes the 'electronic eye on the street' – the CCTV camera – whilst the narratives

that weave through the zine's scattered textual segments show how Ford and her companions evade these security networks. This strategy does not simply subvert 'colonised spaces and master planning strategies' by carving 'out other realms beneath the eye of the CCTV' (Ford 2011: Issue 7, 7). It also intervenes into the cycle of social fear and alienation that perpetuates the ongoing proliferation of those security infrastructures. *Savage Messiah* reiterates over and over again that it is not the violence of side streets and back alleys – the 'mossy corridors' and 'lost industrial estates' (Issue 7, 4) – that should be feared. Rather, urban violence is rooted, for Ford, in the steady march of neo-liberal capital, or 'the slick rebranding' of 'North American banalisation' (Issue 3, 9).

Reading *From Hell*'s mapping of London back through *Savage Messiah*'s radical spatial politics foregrounds its commentary on the contemporary gentrification of East London. Kim Willsher documents how, when Haussmann took on the job of re-developing nineteenth-century Paris, 'he was summoned to the emperor's official residence at the Palais de Tuileries, where Napoléon III produced his plan for Paris':

It showed a map of the city with three straight, dark lines drawn over it: one running north-to-south and two east-to-west either side of the Seine, all cutting through some of the most densely populated but historic areas of central Paris. (2016: n.pag.)

From Hell's mapping of London, particularly as it is undertaken in Chapter 4, is uncannily reminiscent of Haussmann's urban restructuring. Campbell depicts Gull quite literally placing a map of the city before him and, with his companion Netley, taking a ruler and pencil and drawing a set of 'straight, dark lines' that cut through its 'most densely populated but historic areas'. 'Rule a line', Gull tells Netley, 'from Isle of Dogs to Battle Bridge through Christ Church, Old Street, Bunhill Fields and through Northampton Square. Don't look afraid! 'Tis but a ruler' (Moore and Campbell 1999: Chapter 4, 36, see Figure 8). *From Hell* thus dramatizes what might best be

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described as the ‘Haussmannization’ of London, a process that resonates with Ford’s description of London’s more recent urban development.

<<insert fig. 8 here>>

Figure 8: Gull and Netley rule a set of Haussmann-like lines through the centre of London; reproduced with permission of the artist and publisher.

Within this context, Gull’s violation of the city’s poorer, vulnerable populations, as they are (dis)embodied in his prostitute victims, might be read as allegorically representative of the kinds of violent gentrification taking place at the time of *From Hell*’s production. As Lukic and Parezanovic point out, though Gull displays a ‘lack of interest in sexual intercourse with the prostitutes’ that he murders, ‘he nevertheless “purchases” [them] by giving them money, feeding them with grapes, or providing a gift, such as a bonnet or a handkerchief’ (2016: 7). Similarly, urban redevelopment policies in East London during the 1980s – such as ‘Thatcher’s right to buy and the sell-off of millions of council homes’ – led to ‘the incremental privatisation of every aspect of social and so-called “affordable housing”’ (Minton 2016: n.pag.). *From Hell* narrates processes of gentrification, as ‘[h]ostile landscapes are regenerated, cleansed, reinfused with middle-class sensibility’ and ‘elite gentility is democratised in mass-produced styles of distinction’ (Smith 2005: 11). The prostitutes, which problematize Gull’s vision of ‘elite gentility’, are literally ‘cleansed’, removed from the urban landscape by his violent actions. Read through the lens of gentrification, Gull’s actions become, I would argue, an allegorical manifestation of the structural violence of neo-liberal urban development.

Conclusion: Resisting gentrification through violence

This article has argued that, just as an expansive gentrification gradually moves through urban space, encountering, commodifying and, finally, consuming its marginalized spaces and communities, in many ways the gentrification of cultural forms – and in particular, the reclassification and sanitization of subcultural practices such as comix and zine cultures into the more ‘literary’ and academically palatable ‘graphic novel’ – might follow a similar trajectory. However, if *From Hell* now circulates as a ‘graphic novel’ predominantly amongst mainstream readerships who purchase it from high street bookshops or study it on literature courses at universities, *Savage Messiah*’s subject matter and formal construction, both expressions of a violently radical politics, have, I want to conclude, worked to maintain its subcultural status. Though the subject of Ford’s critique is undoubtedly the structural violence of private and state infrastructural developments in East London, the political resistance Ford advocates is itself so violent as to be unpalatable to, if not actively to alienate, readerships that are complicit with both urban and cultural gentrification. As Ford writes:

Middle class hippies plead with us not to let violence mar their special night, not to let ugly scenes overshadow their memories of such a great place. These are the ‘fluffies’ you have to contend with when mass demos shift towards wrecking sprees. These are the types who try to physically restrain you and chant ‘no violence’ when you’re about to smash a window. (2011: Issue 7, 4)

Savage Messiah makes an ‘active, instrumental [contribution] to the understanding of city-space that exhibit[s] a dynamic interventionist aesthetic’, ‘mapping routes through the urban landscape’ through a radicalized *flâneurism* as an alternative way of ‘exercising and expressing agency’ (Boehmer and Davies 2015: 397). Crucially though, through its violent rhetoric, it refuses to commodify those alternative experiences and spaces for a gentrifying cultural marketplace. By resisting this *cultural* gentrification through its documentation and advocacy of violent resistance to *urban* gentrification, the zine alienates readers that do not share Ford’s outrage. Significantly, her

unashamed advocacy of criminal violence is communicated through an explicitly violent form, comprised of torn pages, distorted photographs and rugged drawings. Indeed, the characters who populate *Savage Messiah* dismiss fellow protestors or urban citizens who, though taking an interest in the formal and political destruction of the metaphorical 'windowpane', refuse to commit to actual violent action – that is, to 'smash' an actual 'window'.

These incitements to politically informed violence aligns *Savage Messiah* with the more radical end of a spectrum of urban movements such as Occupy London, whose publications exhibit a similar co-mixing of image and text, collaborative and subcultural forms of production, and advocations of rioting and indiscriminate violence. Their primary publication, *Voices of resistance from occupied London*, is a collaboratively produced multi-form journal that first appeared in 2007, just as the top-down urban redevelopments associated with the 2012 Olympics were beginning to take hold. Edited by a largely anonymous group of authors and artists, contributors mostly remain identifiable only by nicknames and e-mail addresses, emphasizing their underground, subcultural status. Their resistance to marketization is best encapsulated in their comments on copyright: 'Voices of Resistance from Occupied London and all of its content is copyright free; reproduction is particularly encouraged for the purpose and benefit of the social antagonist movement' (Anon. 2007: 1). Here, the publication actively undercuts any kind of monetized marketplace whatsoever. Critical and often violently angry essays that attack the gentrification of London are interspersed with artwork depicting moments of urban unrest, including the active destruction of gentrified spaces, state apparatuses and security infrastructures.

But these co-mixed zines continue to exhibit a self-reflexive stance that strategically distances this urban resistance from mindless violence, rather using innovative formal strategies to justify what remains an explicitly political project. For example, 'The Cancer Cells' by Edd 'Last Hours' satirizes the increasing restrictions placed on resistance practices through the securitization of the city, whilst using the comics frame to emphasize this oppression (see Figure 9). 'So you were arrested for being in the square then?', asks a character in one of the comic's opening scenes,

neglecting to realize that the speaker himself is entrapped within the square of the comic's panel. His interlocutor then informs him: 'Most people had been turned away & told they'd be nicked if they had the audacity to protest against the opening of parliament' (Anon. 2007: 35), foregrounding the restricted movement resulting from securitized urban space through a subtle melding of content and form.

<<insert fig. 9 here>>

Figure 9: 'The Cancer Cells' comic strip by Edd 'Last Hours', in issue one of *Voices of resistance from occupied London*.

Whilst Occupy London's publications recognize the connections between local urban development and the broader motions of global capital, their collaborative and subcultural production processes also emphasize the relationship between the gentrification of urban space and the cultural forms that might be used to resist it. As the editorial to the publication's first edition comments:

One of the journal's main aspirations is to use itself as a medium to facilitate the exchange of such experiences and ideas, galvanising links between us here and our friends and comrades 'abroad'. [...] In the process of interpreting what it is that represses us in the city, we have sought and received the most welcome help of contributors not necessarily abiding to our own ideas and principles. This is an anarchist publication aspiring to offer space to all people from within the wider spectrum of that antagonist social movement. (Anon. 2007: 3)

These movements look outwards, exploring the violent ramifications of urban gentrification and connecting these processes to the neo-liberal reshaping of cities into patchworks of unevenly developed pockets of poverty and wealth. In so doing, they embody what Merryfield claims as the resistant flip side of neo-Haussmannization's coin: cities may function as the 'engine for capital

accumulation, on the one hand', but also, and just as definitively, as 'a site for social/class struggle, on the other' (2014: 1).

From Hell, which has undoubtedly moved onto the 'main street' of culture, allegorizes the structural violence of neo-liberalism through Gull's murders in the city's back alleys, but might simultaneously be accused of commodifying such processes by selling these images to a gentrifying marketplace for profit. However, the violence of the form and content of zines such as *Savage Messiah*, as well as their subcultural production processes that enable alternative ways of inhabiting urban space through the construction of underground social networks, have ensured that they stay off this 'main street'. Read together, *Savage Messiah* mobilizes *From Hell*'s latent political commentary through the inter-textual connections identified here, whilst also highlighting the way in which gentrifying labels such as 'the graphic novel' might on occasion sanitize and smooth over these subversive politics. Conversely, zines have not only found a way to inhabit both marginal urban and cultural spaces, but to use those spaces to activate resistance to the violence of gentrification, formally dismembering not the city's dispossessed and impoverished inhabitants (symbolized in Gull's prostitutes), but the security infrastructures and other discriminatory urban developments that are currently tearing through the landscapes of twenty-first century cities.

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Notes

ⁱ Of course, comics artists have always had an eye on ‘the audience and the demands of the marketplace’ (Eisner 1986: 6). But despite Eisner’s optimistic protestations – ‘Publishers are only catalysts. No more should be expected from them’ (1986: 141) – the increased popularity and marketability of the graphic novel, as opposed to the comic, intensifies these processes.

ⁱⁱ I include chapter numbers in these references to *From Hell* because, in order to replicate its original serial publication, the pagination starts over with each chapter in the collected edition of the comic. Throughout the remainder of the article, I will cite the chapter with the first number included in the brackets, and the page number referenced within that chapter with the second.

ⁱⁱⁱ The written pieces in Nuttall and Mbembe’s *The Elusive Metropolis* (2008) are interspersed with drawings of Johannesburg by William Kentridge. Kentridge’s charcoal depictions of the city both embody what Mbembe calls the ‘aesthetics of superfluity’, and resemble the nebulous aesthetics of

Campbell's London, emphasizing the 'elusiveness' of the metropolis's 'urban rationality' (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008: 37–67).

^{iv} It is widely known that in his earlier works, Moore 'consistently viewed his creative work as contributing to wider political activism, as propaganda for an alternative world-view and a means of changing social consciousness', and some of Moore's other works – most notably *V for Vendetta* (1982–85) – should clearly be read 'in terms of antagonism to Thatcherist hegemony' (Gray 2010: 31).