Chapter 2

Art Invades and Appropriates

Having explored encounters between the verbal and the visual in art and advertising, I now want to look at artists who have not only appropriated the language and forms of advertising, but also "invaded" the spaces of advertising.

Art and advertising rubbed shoulders in what seemed to be an unprecedented way in the late twentieth century, when a number of artists began to display their work in public spaces normally the preserve of promotional imagery. The move into the street began in the late 1960s, with what is thought to be the first example of billboard art in the USA, Joseph Kosuth's Class 4, Matter, 1. Matter in General (1968). Although highly conceptual, Kosuth's billboards were a pioneering attempt to take art out of the gallery and to make it publicly accessible. They were also to pave the way for later artists to use the billboard for their own subversive or oppositional purposes. The desire to take art closer to the public echoes one of the key aims of the politically radical strand of the early twentieth-century avant-garde, which was to bring art closer to life and to raise social and political awareness on a wider scale. The poster and billboard art of the late twentieth century is also connected to that of the early twentieth-century avant-garde by the use of formal approaches often associated with modernism, in particular, directness of expression and the simplification of form. As will be seen, practices developed by the Russian avant-garde in the early part of the century are especially relevant to those that developed in the billboard and poster art of the late 1970s and 1980s, simply because they provided a precedent for the way that the strategies of commercial advertising can be harnessed to avant-garde practice. These developments in Russia were set against a climate of revolutionary optimism, where art was to be of functional or political value to the masses. Late twentieth-century poster and billboard art in the West, however, was to kick against the reactionary politics of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations, during which fine art had become a fashionable and expensive commodity.

Art moved into the streets at a time when the gap between the haves and have-nots in society was visibly widening. It was a time when the social infrastructures of both America and Britain were being seriously undermined in favour of private enterprise and individual gain; a time when the avant-garde in art was in the process of redefining itself, prompting a number of artists to embrace the forms and techniques of the mass media in order to deliver oppositional messages in an accessible manner. Obviously, an industry such as advertising was prominent in the 'spectacularisation' of the entrepreneurial and consumer expansion of the 1980s, along with other forms of mass media such as glossy magazines, film and television, all of which are dominant cultural mediators that also act as popular mentors. It is no coincidence then that a number of artists who had matured in this media culture chose to express their criticisms of its values by inserting themselves into the arena of that culture, adopting and parodying its forms. Yet, ironically, many of the artists who opposed the status quo were also to profit from the economic boom of the 1980s, when the art market notably improved for members of the contemporary avant-garde. As Lisa Phillips has noted, the relationship between art and the media in the 1980s was complicated because, in simultaneously criticising the system and benefitting from it, artists seemed to be having their cake and eating it. In other words, despite their counter-cultural thrust, they were also complicit in the maintenance of a commodity-based system. As Richard Bolton put it, artists had to 'negotiate the space between high art and mass culture, between the elite audience and the general public, between rejection of the system and acceptance of it.' Within the framework of billboard and poster art, it is perhaps only the
Vance with American both war indeed, the renowned poster was rampant and when might be system that forms such the economy needed consumers as well as producers, at least in the early years of transition to a new social and economic order. This idea that commercial advertising can make a legitimate contribution to a socialist society provides a useful foil to the perception of advertising that has recently dominated. Indeed, the contrast between attitudes to advertising in Russia in the interwar period and those which developed in the West immediately after the Second World War is pronounced, particularly in the USA. On that side of the Atlantic, post-war debates about the probity of advertising developed in the climate of the cold war, when fear of Soviet infiltration into the West was rampant and when advertising for many social critics came to carry both the sins of capitalism and the sins of communism at the same time. Vance Packard, for example, while questioning the role advertising played in American consumerism, clearly conflated it with the notion of indoctrination associated with communism, citing Americans as the most manipulated people outside the Iron Curtain.

In Britain, it was Victor Burgin’s series UK 76 (1976) that was instrumental in the resurrection of the notion of a socially relevant poster art. A now-renowned poster – What Does Possession Mean to You? 7% of our Population owns 84% of our Wealth (fig. 4) – illustrates these hard-hitting statistics with an image of romantic fulfillment and sexual promise typical of the consumer advertising of the period, ironically turning the strategies of consumer advertising against themselves and exposing the contradictions of capitalism. Although What Does Possession Mean to You? was first fly-posted in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1976, Burgin had been working on the ironic juxtaposition of found images and text since the early 1970s. At this point, it is tempting to see a connection between the development of these approaches in Burgin’s work and the mounting of a major Arts Council exhibition of Russian Revolutionary art at London’s Hayward Gallery early in 1971. Certainly, by 1976, Burgin had acquired a detailed knowledge of early modern Soviet art and subscribed to the notion of a socially relevant art based on ideas developed by the Soviet avant-garde. He was, for instance, taken with the approaches to mass representation advocated by the constellation of Soviet writers and artists who gathered around Lef magazine in the early 1920s, especially their faith in the power of the advertisement as a ‘poetic supplement’. Lef writers and artists sought to transform social and political awareness at a deeper level through a radical restructuring of language (both visual and verbal) and were to prefigure the way that Burgin and other late twentieth-century artists sought to redefine the ‘language’ of art by appropriating the forms of advertising. It is also significant that the preferred methods of representation adopted by Lef writers and artists were those of the mass media, for example, the photograph, the magazine
and, most importantly for the relationship between art and advertising, ‘the placard’ or poster. ‘To the easel painting – claimed to be a permanent source of agitation – Lef opposes the placard, which is topical, designed and adapted for the street, the newspaper and the demonstration, and which hits the emotions with the sureness of artillery fire’.

It is interesting here that Burgin does not actually adopt the advertising styles of the Russian avant-garde, which were bold and outspoken, but uses the more seductive approaches of western consumer advertising. However, Burgin has little time for these approaches when used in advertising, seeing them as duplicitous, creating an illusion of an almost natural world order, despite being heavily laden with ideology. According to Burgin, advertising is powerful and insidious not only because it naturalises ideology but because it is freely received in the environment and tends to pass unremarked, like ideology itself. In contrast, Burgin suggests that socialist art practice is able to undermine the apparently seamless surface according to which ideology is represented in mainstream advertising. This is precisely what was achieved when he produced Possession. For Burgin, the project, as already noted, was to turn the devices of advertising upon themselves, ‘to unmask the mystifications of bourgeois culture by laying bare its codes, by exposing the devices through which it constructs its self image’ and, in what might also be seen as a rehearsal of strategies employed by Les Levine and Barbara Kruger in particular, ‘to expose the contradictions in our class society, to show up what double-think there is in our second nature’.

However, it was the ‘photomurals’ produced by Docklands Community Poster Project, initiated in 1980 (fig. 5), which were to most fully reflect the ideals of the Russian avant-garde in Britain. Instead of an artist producing works to be disseminated to an anonymous public, this project actively involved the public in a way that had been explored in early Soviet Russia. The Docklands Community Poster Project was set up in response to the London Docklands Development Corporation’s plans to redevelop the area for commercial purposes. Government-backed, the Corporation all but had the power to develop without public consent and the Docklands residents were given little say in the plans. Reflecting the tensions between local government and Westminster, the Community Poster Project was funded by local borough councils and Greater London Arts, which in turn funded by the Greater London Council. The realisation of the project was facilitated by


two artists who lived close to the Docklands, Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, who supported the residents in planning the campaign. In effect, Leeson and Dunn functioned as the sort of trained and experienced mediators that had been envisaged by Lenin as far back as 1905, who were to work with ideas from and give feedback to the community. The Docklands posters were produced in two cycles: the first designed to develop awareness of what was happening to the area; the second to develop a historical perspective, showing how Docklands residents had had to struggle for better conditions in the past.

The posters were produced from photographic collages and were highly reminiscent of the anti-Nazi photomontage work of German artist John Heartfield in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This was especially evident in the critique of ‘big business’ in the first cycle, 1980–1984, which is thematically related to Heartfield’s The Real Meaning of the Nazi Salute (1933), in which
Hitler's saluting hand is seen taking a backhander from big business. This image, along with most of Heartfeld's photomontages, was published in AIZ, a magazine that adopted modernist approaches and campaigned relentlessly against Hitler and the Social Democrats.20 In effect, the relationship of the Docklands posters with the historical avant-garde extended beyond practices associated initially with the USSR to those developed by politically radical artists in the context of Nazi Germany. However, what was essentially at stake in both of these historical contexts, as well as in the Docklands poster campaign, was the need to communicate quickly and effectively. The imagery and texts used needed to be straightforward and explicit, delivering short incisive messages, in the manner of advertising or propaganda. While the situation for 1980s billboard and poster artists was not so acute, politics was nevertheless dominated by similarly repressive right-wing forces, prompting a similar appropriation of popular forms by certain politically minded artists.

Yet, while both the billboard format and the sort of visual and textual shorthand characteristic of advertising were used for the display of the Docklands posters, the parallels with commercial advertising stop there. Leeson argued that the Docklands posters 'are designed to get across complex issues and to reveal the underlying structure of what’s going on, whereas advertisements are generally designed to obscure the underlying structure and get across a product name'.21 More accurately, the Docklands posters might be regarded as emulating the strategies of advertising's close relation, propaganda, although just to complicate things, the art critic Sandy Nairne felt it necessary to defend the Docklands posters as art. In discussing the state of contemporary art in the television series and accompanying booklet State of the Art in 1987, Nairne refused simplistic categorisations based on the conventional hierarchical ordering of the visual arts, observing that 'The art-propaganda divide is itself propaganda on behalf of a certain view of art.'22 In short, Nairne identified a changing agenda for the production of art and recognised the diversity of the roles that it can play in an expanded field of practice. Commenting on the limitations of the conventional hierarchical organisation of the visual arts, Nairne stressed the artistic value of the Docklands project as an outstanding example of the inventive use of posters, borne out by other examples of this sort of work that Leeson and Dunn had produced for exhibitions in America and Canada and international magazines. However, while Nairne's desire to classify the Docklands poster project as art can be seen as expanding or even democratising the remit of art by including popular forms, it still sets up a demarcation between advertising, propaganda and art. In his desire - or need - to hang on to the category of art, Nairne reflects the persistence of a related need: to attach a name to the producer of the work, which, in the case of the Docklands Community Project ought to have been the Docklands residents as much as Leeson and Dunn.

Even with champions such as Nairne, however, the acceptance of popular forms such as the billboard as art in Britain was slow and somewhat difficult. The reluctance to legitimise such forms is demonstrated by Declan McGonagle's need to justify this type of work as recently as ten years after the publication of Nairne's book. In an article in 1997 that advocated the use of publicly accessible spaces for the display of contemporary art, McGonagle, in essence, reiterated Nairne's arguments concerning hierarchies in the visual arts. McGonagle's basic quarrel was, firstly, with the idea that art has some sort of eternal relevance, 'that there is a separate, absolute current of meaning, independent of the present tense or social environment with which some artists connect and some others miss' and, secondly, with the idea that art should occupy a neutral zone such as that of the modernist art museum. Fittingly, McGonagle's criticisms of a system that disconnects art and the artist from society have formed the basis of his curatorial activities, including the production, as Director of Exhibitions at the ICA in London, of Dublin-born artist Les Levine's controversial billboard project, Blame God (1985; fig. 6), contemporary with the second phase of the Docklands Community Poster Project. While Blame God was initiated in an attempt to make art more socially relevant, the project was also important for bringing art and advertising closer together - in form, if not in spirit. Levine, like the more widely known American poster artist Barbara Kruger, has made billboards a sustained part of his work, producing, as Kruger has, at least twenty and, also like Kruger, has made it his business to interrupt the uncritical reception of billboard advertisements by the insertion of 'art' billboards.23

Much of Levine's early work had been concerned with exposing the relationship between art and commerce. This is demonstrated by works such as Disposables (1966) or Levine's Restaurant (1969), both of which issued a challenge to the notion that the artwork should be unique and viewed as if it carried an aura of exclusivity.24 Levine also sought to expose the business and marketing systems upon which the art world is founded. Levine's Restaurant,
for instance, was a response to the celebrity mentality and pretensions of New York's art bars. Disposables, shown in the Fisbach Gallery, New York, comprised coloured, mass-produced, vacuum-formed, two-dimensional shapes such as squares, diamonds, circles or, in some cases, three-dimensional objects which looked as if they had been formed around cylinders or boxes. Levine's point was that, in many cases, it is only market mechanisms that restrict the supply of artworks and that the inaccessibility of the artwork is not so much to do with scarcity as with economic strategies. Kenneth Noland's stripe paintings of the 1960s, for example, could easily have been mass reproduced with hardly any loss of quality. As Levine himself commented:

Thousands [of the disposables] have sold and some have thrown them out. They've probably been sold to only ten or twelve people who could be considered collectors; this means that many people who have never owned a work of art have gotten involved in the activity of collecting. You see it's like Keynesian economics: it's not what you produce that's so important, but turnover and circulation. Economically art movements work the same way.27

It follows that the size and nature of the public to whom the work was to be addressed would also be an issue for Levine and that the commitment towards a wider public was what motivated his billboard work as well as what brought it closer to advertising. Speaking of the Blame God posters, Levine makes their intended relationship with advertising clear, referring to them for instance as a campaign. Levine also confirmed that the importance of choosing the billboard as a medium was the fact that the works would be out on the street and seen by a significant number of people. He claimed that his messages were spread in a similar way to the advertising message, by 'infectious connection', suggesting that not everyone needed to see the work but that the message could be spread to the community at large by those who saw the billboard: 'It doesn't have the same degree of immunisation as a painting or sculpture.28

It is, of course, much more difficult for unique works of art to have this sort of directly contagious effect, even when disseminated through infectious media such as television or magazines, since their exposure to the public is limited to interested audiences rather than inserted freely into public spaces. In addition to the advantages offered in terms of commanding public attention, Levine settled upon the medium of the billboard because he also believed it allowed a radical contribution to the methodologies of both art and advertising. The use of billboards for the Blame God campaign was an attempt to make both practices 'high risk' and contentious. In effect, it proved to be a rehearsal for the sort of contention caused by Oliviero Toscani's highly controversial Shock of Reality campaign for Benetton in 1991–1992. As Toscani was to do, Levine produced images that sat somewhere between art and advertising and that deliberately disrupted and outraged the public:

... by nature of using advertising, it is simply not enough to create images that are interesting to the art world, or that are titillating or provocative on a political level. One must make images that absolutely put your life on the line. That's what people need from artists, that they're willing to put themselves out on a limb. [The Blame God posters are] very hot images and, as it is with any hot thing, they can be bounced around by many people at different levels.29
The shock value of the *Blame God* campaign was demonstrated by the media attention it received throughout September 1985, many examples of which were reproduced in the ICA publication accompanying their exhibition of Levine’s work in the same year. The depth of feeling behind the negative responses that the campaign provoked can be gauged not only from complaints received, but also in the fact that the hoarding company, London and Provincial tried to renege on their posting contract,26 and from the hostile behaviour of one member of the public, who threw a pot of black paint over one of the posters near the Elephant and Castle in London. As Michael McNay, writing for *The Guardian*, noted, this gesture seemed to reverse Ruskin’s libellous statement about Whistler throwing a pot of paint into the public’s face and perhaps conferred an aura to the work by default. It certainly transpired that Levine, despite his earlier critiques of art and commerce, was able to price his posters at £50,000, on the basis that they were limited-edition screen prints.27 The introduction of this sort of pricing seems to be a far cry from the philosophy that underpinned the *Disposables* and, although Levine’s billboard posters acquired radical potential by temporarily mimicking advertisements, this sort of price tag demonstrates that their ultimate destiny was that of a collectible work of art. This raises questions about how far Levine’s claims that his billboards functioned as advertisements were realised. In provoking media attention and a violent response, the posters were successful in making people pay attention to the issues that they raised and prompted debate about the posters, so from this point of view they can be seen to have achieved at least some of the desired effects. Yet, it could also be argued that what was generated was not an engagement with the works themselves but publicity about the ‘campaign’, which added value to the works as art commodities.28

As far as the public responses to Levine’s posters are concerned, it seems that the problem was largely with the ambiguous nature of the wording on the posters which, intended as a comment on the absurdity of committing genocide in the name of God, could all too easily be seen as a religious slight. Applied to the subject matter of the posters – the conflict in Northern Ireland – imperatives such as ‘blame God’, ‘attack God’, ‘hate God’ or ‘torture God’, forced the viewer to rethink the message itself and highlighted their irreverent and blasphemous content.29 As is the case with Barbara Kruger’s billboard work, this mode of address also called for the viewer to rethink the way that the imperative is used rather than absorbing it uncritically as is the case in most conventional advertising. When used to direct the consumption of beauty products, for instance, the imperative appears innocuous, a bidding to do something to the consumer’s advantage while, in effect, establishing an ethos of conformism. McGonagle notes that the fiercest resistance to Levine’s work came from his staunchest Christian critics who, of course, particularly angered by the inverted message that Christian societies are actually killing, starving or bombing.30 Both McGonagle and Levine pointed out that advertisements that promote cancer-giving products or demean women tend to escape public censure. In other words, the *Blame God* campaign ousted not only the hypocrisy of the traditional Christian church but also the hypocrisy of traditional advertising practices that made superficial promises towards an improved quality of life but, in the long run, were detrimental to the quality of people’s lives. In this, Levine made serious demands of his viewers, asking them to read deeply rather than superficially and, in this respect, he shared approaches practised by several other artists working in public spaces.

Along with and perhaps even more so than Levine, it is Barbara Kruger who epitomises the politically motivated, media-conscious artist described at the start of this chapter. As Kruger herself readily admits, a major factor in her engagement with the forms of advertising and the mass media is the training she received and the work that she subsequently did as a graphic designer. When, after some ten years of billboard production, she was asked by Karrie Jacobs in an interview for *Eye* in 1991 whether she still felt as if she was doing design or advertising, she expressed a preference to be seen as ‘someone who works with pictures and words’. Nevertheless, she noted that she felt that, rather than deriving from advertising, her methods stemmed from the work she had done in editorial design.31 Kruger had been slightly more forthcoming on the subject in an earlier interview, this time with Jeanne Seigel for *Arts Magazine* in 1987.32 Here, Kruger also emphasised the importance of her experience as a graphic designer, which she claimed took precedence in the late 1970s over the influence of her peer group, who were also heavily involved in ‘a vernacular form of signage’. While characterising her skills as knowing how to ‘deal with an economy of image and text which beckoned and fixed the spectator’, she admitted that her method combined the ‘ingratiating of [the] wish desire’ of advertising with her own ‘criticality of knowing better’. Here, Kruger acknowledged that she shared common strategies with advertising.
but explained that she used these devices 'to get people to look at the picture, and then to displace the conventional meaning that the image usually carries with perhaps a number of different meanings'.

Yet, as several critics have noted, Kruger does not in fact reference contemporary advertising but employs period images that carry a certain nostalgia for the 1940s and 1950s. This strategy allows Kruger to tap into shared memories that give added value to such images, removing them from the immediacy of contemporary advertising and creating a particular hold on the viewer. Even though, as Liam Gillick notes, examples of the same 'clunky American advertising technique' survived well into the 1990s, most leading mainstream advertisements of the 1980s fell into an approach that has been dubbed 'Capitalist Realism', which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. In essence, this is a type of advertising characterised by glossy photographic representations of the good life, attending to subliminal desire rather than acting as rather simplistic exhortations or announcements. In effect, the poster and billboard work of both Kruger and Levine fits into an older exhortatory or annunciatory mode of advertising. According to this set of conventions, the image is used as a straightforward illustration or amplification of the verbal message, although, of course, this is hardly ever simply the case in the work of either Kruger or Levine, where the relationship of image to text is almost invariably subject to an ironic twist. Moreover, in Kruger's case, the verbal messages are frequently juxtaposed with images that have become grotesque in their transposition from one context to another, for example, in Untitled (Buy me, I'll change your life) (1984, fig. 7) or Untitled (You are a captive audience) (1992). In both cases, the images are taken from the humble source of magazine photography and, although congruous with the text, the result is both jarring and alienating, due to a process of drastic cropping and enlarging.

A form of sarcasm also underpins these and other less grotesque works such as the Help series, a public art bus shelter project, mounted in Queens, New York, in 1991 (fig. 8). Each of the posters presents the word 'HELP!' as a strap-line, upper case, in white on a red background that in turn overlays a photograph of a three-quarter-length male figure. The male figures vary in social type, but all are accompanied by a brief piece of autobiographical copy which tells of reaching a point of achievement in their lives then ends in an ironic ruse in the form of another strap-line reading 'I've just found out

I'm pregnant. What should I do?' Such a dilemma, of course, only applies at a remove to men, making the message about gender inequality abundantly clear. Needless to say, the use of grotesque imagery or ironic copy of this sort is normally alien to consumer advertising.

Kruger has also repeatedly employed straight-speaking modernist typefaces such as Futura or Helvetica Bold, which has been termed, 'the signature typeface of post-industrial capitalism', providing another indication of her origins as a graphic designer as well as another link with modernism. This identification with the signature style of modern typography is interesting because, in employing these typefaces in conjunction with black and white photographs and red strap-lines, Kruger has developed a signature style of her own. Indeed, in spite of the appropriations from more anonymous arenas of representation such as advertising and graphic design, and in spite of their presentation on billboards, Kruger's works have been readily received as art and the products of individual authorship. Through this development
of a signature style, Isabelle Graw has suggested that Kruger 'prefigures the currently acceptable idea that the artist has to develop a label.' At the same time, however, Graw also recognises that Kruger was producing a socially engaged art, acting as an author-producer in a way envisaged by Walter Benjamin earlier in the century. Not only, as Graw argues, does Kruger make use of the montage forms praised by Benjamin (which, of course, bring her close to the Constructivist influence that she denies), but the social and political themes addressed in her work also align with Benjamin's suggestion that art should address the class relations of the society in which it is produced.

It is here that Kruger's relationship to the early twentieth-century avant-garde becomes more apparent. Kruger has expressed frustration at having to deal with an 'art subculture' that had no understanding of the significance of her experience in graphic design and that persisted in situating her in relation to the Constructivist strand of the historical avant-garde, of which she knew little in her formative years as an artist. However, her reading of Benjamin was a formative influence, as she confirmed in an interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve for Art in America in September 1997, admitting to being 'blown away' by both Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes. And, although Kruger denies a direct connection between her work and that of the Constructivists, a link nevertheless exists in the call for a socially relevant art and in the advocacy of popular forms of representation and the more active engagement of the 'reader' that are made in Benjamin's 'The Author as Producer'. However, while approaches that originate in the practices of the early twentieth-century avant-garde are used to harness and expose the 'class' struggles of the late twentieth century, Kruger simultaneously uses them to provoke reflection upon the ideological role of language rather than to deliver ideology per se. In other words, it is this introduction of critical reflexivity that separates Kruger's works from the works of the early twentieth-century avant-garde and ultimately renders them postmodern rather than modernist.

The radical wing of the late twentieth-century avant-garde in art did not just appropriate forms and approaches from the historical avant-garde, but took their works into the 'street'. Again this is highly reminiscent of practices established in Russia shortly after the October Revolution of 1917, when the notion of fine art was discredited and replaced by the more directly socially relevant categories of agitational propaganda art (agit-prop), laboratory art and production art. Laboratory art was basically visual research of a formalist
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nature and was meant to underpin production art, which, in essence, had replaced the notion of the applied arts. Of the three types of 'art', it is agit-prop art that prefigures the practices taken up by Krüger, Levine and other artists who invaded the streets, including Jenny Holzer, who began her work in public spaces with electronic displays of verbal messages (for example, Protect me from what I want, Piccadilly Square, London, 1991). Unsurprisingly, agit-prop art largely consisted of poster work, although, more unexpectedly, the use of 'high-tech' was anticipated in projects for the cinematic projection of messages. The aims of Russian agit-prop art were to spread the revolutionary message as widely, quickly and directly as possible to a population that was frequently uneducated and, in remoter parts of Russia, unaware of the Revolution and the political issues that prompted it. These messages were not only displayed in the streets but on the sides of long-distance boats and trains. In this, Russian agit-prop art set a clear precedent for artists and producers such as Burgin, Leeson and Dunn, Levine, Krüger and Holzer, who took their art out of the more exclusive confines of the gallery space into public spaces. By and large, these spaces are readily accessible and, importantly, were not only spaces of mass communication and popular culture but are also spaces that, in their anonymity, have a history of popular resistance.

Writing in relation to Holzer's work, David Joselit speaks of its presence in 'those sites of anonymous transportation, consumption and entertainment from local supermarkets to international airports.' Of the texts 'seize the institutional power of language as it exists in the built environment': mimicking Augé but always recoding it. Employing a term coined by the anthropologist Marc Augé, Joselit also refers to these anonymous sites of consumption as 'non-places', which are defined by the mobility of 'supermodernity' and the transitory cultural interventions it brings (such as the words and images of advertising) as much as by bricks and mortar. It has been argued elsewhere that spaces of this sort have become the privileged spaces of the postmodernisation of society. Mike Featherstone, for instance, has suggested that the existence of such spaces is symptomatic of the collapse of the old social hierarchies embodied in traditional architecture and monuments. In these newly privileged spaces of postmodernity - such as the shopping mall or the airport - social values are inscribed in the cultural practices that are developed in and around the spaces of the city. Here, signs, advertisements or shop windows, for example, are to be read symbolically rather than functionally and to assist in the styling of life. From this point of view, it may be argued that art's entry into the world of consumer signs was facilitated by the fact that the viewer was already disposed to treat the street as a place for the acquisition of symbolic knowledge through a wide variety of signs, including posters and the display of consumer goods. Such knowledge is acquired almost by a process of grazing and the signs that supply it are not presented or read in a systematic way.

Augé and Featherstone's notions of 'supermodern' or postmodern spaces relate to the notion of social space, which was put forward in 1974 by French theorist Henri Lefebvre. In line with fellow French theorist Michel de Certeau, Lefebvre recognised that there are ways of appropriating public spaces to turn them into sites of resistance against the controls of the dominant culture. For Lefebvre, appropriated space is situational, a matter of creating and responding to situations, a place for actions and interactions, expressiveness and revolt. Significantly, one of the ways in which space becomes situational is again through the world of signs and images. Lefebvre comes close here to the notion of detournement put forward by the Situationist International, a radical association, formed in 1957, that was made up of a broad spectrum of people who shared similar counter-cultural values, including philosophers, writers, artists and architects. Detournement - literally 'diversion' or 'rerouting' - meant finding ways in which the environment could be subverted in order to make people critically aware of their 'situation': in appropriating billboards or poster hoardings, artists are able to intervene in and redirect the world of signs, opening it up to alternative meanings and inflections. Art can thus be seen to form a bridge between the relatively unstructured everyday resistances, sitting down while the national anthem is being played, for instance, or even trespassing on the grass, that are small but vital demonstrations of disaffection with the controls exerted by the dominant culture. What is important about billboard and other forms of street art is that they change the way that social space is produced and consumed, opening it up to that which is non-mainstream or 'other' and destroying the sense of coherency produced by conventional and ordered uses of space. The difference between these works and consumer advertisements is that the disruptions brought by the latter tend on the whole to work as welcome distractions or even minor irritations rather than as direct challenges to the status quo. While Lefebvre's notion of
the situational and the Situationist notion of *detournement* chimes neatly with the interventions made by artists such as Kruger and Levine, it also fits with the interventions of activist art, a form of cultural terrorism largely identified with American groups such as Gran Fury (AIDS), the Guerrilla Girls (Gender equality in the art world) or Adbusters (campaigning against and subverting commercial advertising).

Driven by pressing single issues and less inclined to examine general attitudes and principles than most of the work discussed earlier, the work of activist groups was often anonymous, coming close to public service and charity advertisements. In activist art, a vital social message needs to be conveyed quickly and effectively, usually, although not always, without the appeal to the libido or desire that characterises so much of consumer advertising. For their part, advertisements operating without this sort of libidinal content often represent social themes and have also fulfilled the promise of social advertising advocated by the Russian avant-garde. Leaders in the field of current ‘social advertising’ are Saatchi & Saatchi, who have a substantial record of producing high quality social-cause campaigns. Numerous examples of Saatchi ‘social advertising’ from branches of the Saatchi & Saatchi agency worldwide can be found in *Social Work: Saatchi & Saatchi’s Cause-Related Ideas*, a publication which accompanied a travelling exhibition of their public service posters. These include a well-known pioneering example, *Pregnant Man*, for the Health Education Council in 1970, and the uncompromisingly illustrated *Women and Children First* poster for Greenpeace (1996), which showed a baby with hydrocephalus, the result of ‘harmless’ radiation tests in Kazakhstan. The placing of these advertisements into an exhibition, of course, can be seen as the opposite move to that of taking art into the streets, undermining the purpose and effectiveness of the original campaigns by turning them into objects of artistic contemplation.

Moreover, these campaigns clearly originated in the realm of advertising and did not in themselves play an active part in the blurring of the boundaries between art and advertising in the way that billboard and activist art did. In terms of public service campaigns, this erosion of boundaries was achieved by an AIDS-awareness campaign that was not generated by advertisers but by a number of well-established contemporary artists. *On the Road: Art Against Aids* (1989) was to be one of the most highly visible AIDS poster campaigns in America, and was commissioned by the American Foundation for AIDS Research (AmFAR). The works produced varied in whether they looked like ‘art’ or ‘advertising’, ranging from the direct, recognisable graphic styles of John Lindell and Barbara Kruger to the less pointed, more reflective photographic representations by Brian Weil of an HIV-positive baby and by Robert Mapplethorpe of two men embracing. In all, twenty-two artists were asked to develop works that were to address the issues of AIDS in public sites such as billboards, bus shelters and bus panels. As these are ‘non-spaces’ with no pretensions to high culture, the status of the works is ambiguous, neither art nor advertising per se but something in between that takes the best of both. The morally questionable aspects of consumer advertising do not figure and the much-criticised elitism of art is no longer an issue.

Nevertheless, the co-option of named artists in this project raises issues of authorship and authentication. The move into outdoor sites usually dedicated to consumer advertising not only signals a shift in the perception of the artwork as unique and original, but also proposes a shedding of the aura that emanates from the framing of art in galleries, museums or private collections. Yet, while billboard art is accessible in the way that advertisements are, it is not always anonymous in the way that advertisements are. The work of major billboard artists was quickly identified as the product of individual authors and gained much of its status and authenticity from this fact. Interestingly, however, works of art which ironically and parodically mimicked advertising without recourse to a product were appearing in the contexts normally associated with advertisements, the avant-garde advertisements which appeared at the same time began to shed any direct representation of the product and develop a signature style. Just as most of the works of art discussed above were authenticated by the name of the author, these advertisements developed a particular style that was not only authenticated by the name of a brand (which as Naomi Klein has recently shown is by no means the same as a product) but also by a distinct type of imagery. In developing such an identifiable style, these major campaigns gained an aura almost equivalent to that of the name of an artist and have undermined functionalist perceptions of advertising. As I will show, advertisers did as much in their own way as poster or billboard art to bring art to the streets in the late 1970s and 1980s.

I want to finish this chapter by flagging up an acclaimed word-based advertising campaign that also made use of unconventional spaces and
that is particularly significant because here we see cutting-edge practices in the advertising of art. The campaign was devised for britart.com by the comparatively young award-winning agency Mother and ran for eight months from August 2000. The strategy behind the campaign was to produce advertising material that reflected the popularising remit of britart.com which, with its motto 'art for the many not for the few', set out to make the viewing and buying of art 'an everyday occurrence rather than an extraordinary occurrence'. The form the campaign took was that of fly-posters on street furniture, pavements, walls and even trees (fig. 9). However, rather than imitating advertising copy, the creatives simulated the sort of labels that accompany artworks in an exhibition and treated the site as an artwork. For example, the poster on junction boxes read 'Junction Box, 1971, steel, paint, wiring, electricity, 100 x 120 x 50 cm'; the wording on the pavement flyer read 'Pavement, 1962, concrete slabs, cement, shoe prints, dog excrement, chewing gum, 8000 x 15050 x 10 cm'. Here, we are back in the territory not only of ambient advertising but also that of conceptual wordsmiths such as Lawrence Weiner, who raised issues about the nature of art itself.

What was required for the advertising of a retail outlet that wanted to show the affordability of contemporary art was a campaign that could 'alter the perceptions of a previously elitist and mystifying market'. In producing a series of posters that labelled street objects in the manner of the gallery, Mother simultaneously parodied the practices of high art and made a joke out of the fact that almost anything can be designated art. Moreover, the relegation of the promotional message to the comparatively diminutive strapline 'art you can buy' and the playful attachment of the red 'sold' dot to the logo assists in the reading of the posters as works of conceptual art rather than advertisements, at least in the first instance. In adopting 'interventionist' strategies in order to advertise art, the britart.com campaign blurred the boundaries between the two regimes in a way that is symptomatic of the apparently ever-increasing fluidity of contemporary culture. Indeed, the fact that the campaign could take such a publicly irreverent stance towards both traditional and contemporary art can be read as a sign of détente and of the demystification of art.

What was generated around the formation of britart.com was a rhetoric not only of the affordability but also of the now more relational or personalised approaches that characterise contemporary art, reflected in the direct-mail strand of the campaign. The mailings invited the interactivity of the recipients and, in some cases, gave them a producerly role to play: for example, the boxed 'Art Pencil' that held the promise that everything it drew would become art. That an avant-garde gambit such as this is now used as a means of advertising art rather than as means of disrupting convention through art shows that conceptualism has become a form of popular, if not exactly common, currency. The question is to what extent this signals the taming of the avant-garde or to what extent it might be seen as a productive and desirable popularisation of its practices. As I have noted, it was the intention of key members of the early twentieth-century avant-garde not only to make art inclusive but also to employ art to reshape people's lives and values. It seems, as Walter Benjamin predicted in 1936, that this could only occur through the mass reproduction of images. Yet this did not in itself prove to be enough and it emerged that what was also needed was for avant-garde approaches to become a viable form of expression in the mass media and for avant-garde art itself to become more understandable, accessible and tolerable to a wider public. This process of assimilation was already well under
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way in some of the major cutting-edge consumer advertising campaigns of the late twentieth century.
