

CITY ARTS

Where the Artist Is

by [Armond White](#) on Mar 13, 2013 • 1:48 pm

Su Friedrich rezones bohemia post-Boorman

As Su Friedrich's *Gut Renovation* (now playing at Film Forum) made the filmmaker's case against the politics of economic and neighborhood change, I envisioned an ideal double-bill:



Gut Renovation should ideally be seen alongside John Boorman's 1990 masterpiece *Where the Heart Is*. Not sure if Friedrich knows that film but there are uncanny similarities. Boorman's movie is a personally-felt comedy about urban economics that, like Friedrich's film, centers around the renovation of a Brooklyn neighborhood.

Boorman balanced his sympathy for artistic and counter-culture impulses with the needs of capitalist revolution. He demolition/rebuild premise re-interpreted Shakespeare's "All that is solid melts into air" (a theory of inevitable if unnerving progressed appropriated by Marxist

social critic Marshall Berman) as the basis of a domestic comedy about family—not cliché “dysfunction” but a domestic allegory about social development (symbolized cutely in a videogame and fashion show).

Working from a screenplay by his daughter Telsche, Boorman turned the saga of gentrification into a *Midsummer Night's Dream* farce that detailed how artistic flowering that goes hand-in-hand with new social functioning. (Boorman’s trompe l’oeil closing credit sequence memorably demonstrated capitalist transformation as part of art and human history.)

Friedrich emphasizes the dissatisfactions that occur with such advancements. *Gut Renovation* displays genuine New York temper; as a 19-year resident of Williamsburg (before it became fashionable), Friedrich protests the change in zoning codes that facilitated her neighborhood’s take-over by real estate developers favored by Mayor Bloomberg’s administration, pushing out artists and small manufacturing businesses.

While Boorman took a farcical, historian’s view, Friedrich sides with the exasperation of those casually politicized citizens who seek futile Socialist solutions to the capitalist advantages they enjoy. They can’t fight City Hall and that frustration fuels some of Friedrich’s most affable, delightful tropes: charting the transition of her Williamsburg neighborhood through a self-made map and territorial countdown; interviewing the small business people being forced out to make room for condominiums; photographing the invading yuppies and their parade of designer dogs.



The thin class membrane separating arriviste yuppies from bohemian bourgeois homesteaders like Friedrich herself gives *Gut Renovation* a fascinating tension. (The warning graffito “Die Yuppie Scum” is replaced by the memento “Artists Used to Live Here”) Friedrich’s self-deprecating pique, familiar from her previous personal documentaries, makes this a rare depiction of privileged-yet-aggrieved urban lifestyles; one of the most honest New York stories ever put on the screen. It reproves the lies and self-deceptions of Woody Allen’s movies.

That’s why I immediately recalled Boorman’s ideologically rich film which perfectly captured that passage from Reagan-era greed to Clinton-era satisfaction. Boorman achieved an unparalleled unity of social experiences including homelessness, bohemians and business elites. Friedrich that knows such economic self-consciousness has been lost in Bloomberg New York. Her artistry—if paired with Boorman’s—might bring it back.

<http://cityarts.info/2013/03/13/where-the-art-is/>