

Gerhard Lang

Through the Looking Glass II

New York City

In my performance that passed through Greenwich Village and the Bowery I viewed the city solely through a *Claude Lorrain mirror*[1], a darkened and slightly convex glass plate as was used by landscape painters in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for their studies of picturesque rural motifs. For them, this instrument offered a different way of seeing. The Painters did not depict what appeared directly before their eyes but what was revealed in the mirror – the mediated image of the setting behind their backs.

I based my performance on these inverted conditions. But I added further components: movement, walking through the city and doing so in reverse. Walking backwards I explored a section of Manhattan solely by observing the city's mirror image. Complex movements of the instrument and my body allowed me to mirror the surroundings behind me that I was about to enter. At the same time my reversed motion offered a stark contrast to the general forward movement around me. Otherness emerged amid normality.

I paused at Astor Place. On the asphalt I laid out a white sheet and placed the mirror on it. The rucksack was put down, the walking stick beside it. A tripod was set up and the mirror fixed to it. With my camera I recorded the mirror image of the city. In this photograph I too could be seen, unlike the landscape painters who never portrayed themselves in their studies.

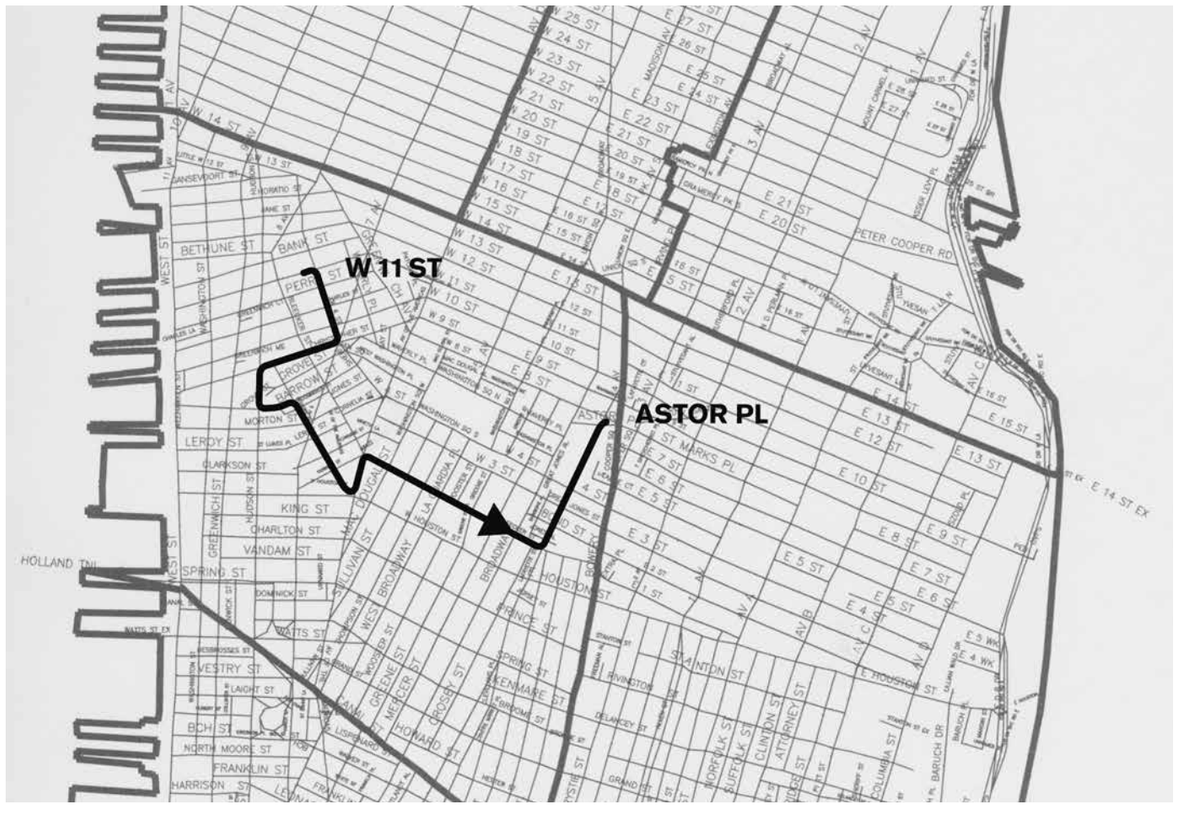
When the camera shutter was released the direction of the performance was inverted. In reverse order I packed all my things bar the stick back into the rucksack, including the mirror. With the rucksack on my back and the walking stick in my hand I left Astor Place, now walking forwards just like all the other pedestrians. I plunged into the general hubbub of Manhattan's streets.











Images: **Page 1:** Intersection 7th Avenue and Christopher Street, 23 November 2012, Photo: Manfred Reiff **Page 2, top:** Bedford Street, corner Barrow Street, 23 November 2012 / Car drivers honking impatiently, waiting for the lights to turn green, corner Bedford Street and 7th Avenue, 14 September 2012, Photos: Manfred Reiff **Below:** Detail of the map of Lower and Midtown Manhattan: the performance *Through the Looking Glass II* had no obvious starting or finishing point. It was photographically recorded and filmed from West 11th Street to Astor Place. The performance passed through the area where Lower Manhattan's original street layout overlaps the regular grid system introduced in 1811. Here one gets a striking impression of the immense interventions into the original urban fabric needed to connect the grid structure to it. **Page 3, top:** Bedford Street, 14 September 2012 / Looking into the mirror, Bleecker Street, corner LaGuardia Place, 21 October 2012, Photos: Manfred Reiff **Page 4:** Freeze frames from the film *Through the Looking Glass II,* filmed on 22nd February 2013, HD, 1h 18', Director of Photography: Christina Lammer, Postproduction: SpringerParker.

[1] The mirror was used by landscape painters towards the end of the eighteenth century. It was named after the French artist Claude Lorrain (1600 - 1682), whose paintings of the idealised roman Campagna strongly influenced subsequent generations of landscape artists.







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