

Alienation and Authenticity in Brixton: An ethnography of a changing neighbourhood

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I, Samuel Barton confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract:

Based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Brixton this thesis documents a neighbourhood undergoing rapid change. In response to the changing nature of the neighbourhood the research observes multiple competing claims to authenticity, arguing that these claims are made in response to the sense of alienation that arises from the messy transformations that Brixton has undergone. The thesis distinguishes between two different forms of authenticity, making this distinction in terms of the relationship between claims to authenticity and experiences of alienation. It argues that those claims to authenticity which are based on external referents produce alienation, and those which are centred on experience and encounter are un-alienated forms of authenticity. These conceptual concerns are interwoven with a fine-grained account of the fieldwork to create a rich document of the neighbourhood.

The research is centred on two sites, a restaurant in Brixton village market and a nearby soup kitchen. These sites are situated in a historical context both in terms of recent changes to the neighbourhood, since 2009, and a larger perspective of Brixton starting with its beginnings as a middle-class suburb in the 19th century. The empirical aspects of this project focus on maintaining a messy epistemology of the city which can accommodate complexities and contradictions which are characteristic of the neighbourhood, and arguably cities in general. In doing so a rich narrative is developed which starts by describing a large protest, and continues to make an account of the transformation of the covered markets before focussing on the field sites. In the final chapter of the thesis a challenging account is made of some of the consequences of the neighbourhood's transformation on some of the neighbourhood's most marginalised, this is built around a chapter about food, one about conspiracy theories and playing cards.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	9
1.1. Always different always the same	9
1.2. Research questions	11
1.3 The research site - Brixton	11
1.4 The research process.	13
1.5 The structure of the thesis.	15
1.6 The purpose of this thesis.....	17
2. Alienation and Authenticity	18
2.1 Alienated from everybody	18
2.2 Alienated from them	22
2.3. Authenticity and neighbourhood change, a critique of Sharon Zukin	25
2.4 Authenticity and encounter	27
2.5 Authenticity under a glass roof.....	30
2.6 Re-enacting Authenticity: Tom McCarthy's Remainder	32
3. A Messy Theory of Urban Change	37
3.1 Introduction	37
3.2 Gentrification from phenomena to theory.....	38
3.3 Other voices	38
3.4 Making and remaking difference in the everyday.....	40
3.5 Multi-culture and race	41
3.6 The practice of everyday difference	45
3.7 Messiness in public – markets and encounter	47
3.8 Conclusion: alienation as a product of neighbourhood change	51
4. Is There Such a thing as Authentic Research?.....	54
4.1 Introduction	54
4.2 A messy epistemology	55
4.3 A Methodology for Authentic Research	60
4.3.1 Ethnography	60
4.3.2 Walking, working and hanging around.....	61
4.3.3 Interviews.....	63
4.3.4 Writing analysis	64
4.3.5 History, archives and objects	65
4.4 On being new at the restaurant	66
4.5 On being new at the soup kitchen	69
4.6 Alienated researcher, authentic research	71
5. Claiming and Reclaiming Brixton.....	76
5.1 Introduction	76
5.2 Suburban speculation	77
5.3 Street market and high street.	79
5.4 Windrush.....	81
5.5 Radicalism and squats.....	82
5.6 Uprising, insurrection, riot	84
5.7 Music, culture, subculture.....	85
5.8 Which Brixton do you want to reclaim?	88
5.9 That'll be good for your PhD.....	89
5.10 April 25 th 2015	90
5.11 Weaving through a fraying movement.....	95
5.12 Conclusion, hope for messy coalitions	98

6. Market at the Heart of the Community	100
6.1 Friends of Brixton Market	100
6.2 Granville Arcade	104
6.3 Spacemakers	106
6.4 An entrepreneurial dreamland.....	110
6.5 Infrastructure	112
6.6 Sunday morning June 2014	115
6.7 “Traditional traders”	116
6.8 Alienation from the means of production	119
6.9 Front of house.....	121
6.10 Zero (hour) rights.....	123
6.11 Conclusion, what is being preserved?	126
7. Eating and Encounter: alienation, authenticity and food.....	130
7.1 Introduction	130
7.2 Alien Food	131
7.2.1 The infant consumer	132
7.2.2 Disgust and the waiter	133
7.2.3 Eating the abject.....	135
7.3 Different strokes for different folks	136
7.3.1 Proper Food.....	138
7.3.2 Food people like to eat	140
7.3.3 Rituals of protection	141
7.4 Pizza and Chips	143
7.5 The black carrot.....	145
7.6 Conclusion, Discernment and Alienation	146
8. Playing Cards & Conspiracy Theories	149
8.1. Introduction	149
8.2 Punitive space?	150
8.3 The rules of blackjack.....	152
8.4 Playing the game	153
8.5 Precarious games with the state	155
8.6 Conspiracy theories	157
8.7 Chess.....	159
8.8 The production of irrational subjects	161
8.9. Medicine	163
8.10 Conclusion: kind of Cassandras.....	164
9. Conclusion	167
9.1 A document of Brixton	167
9.2 Alienated – from work, to place.....	170
9.3 The possibility of authenticity.....	171
9.4. Messy epistemology	172
9.5 Ethnographic methods	173
9.6 Conclusion	175
Appendices:	177
Appendix 1: List of Interlocutors	177
Appendix 2: Research relating to the council without detailed accounts in this thesis.....	187
Appendix 3: Project Timeline	188
Appendix 4: Extracts from field notes	189
List of References	196

List of Figures

- Figure 1. Covered Markets in Brixton. Google Earth image annotated by author.
- Figure 2. Maps of Brixton. Left: section of *London and its Environs* (Rees 1841). Right : section of *Middlesex XXII* Surveyed 1868-1871 (Ordnance Survey 1879)
- Figure 3. M&S Brixton Arch Penny Bazaar around 1903 © M&S Company Archive
Accessed online Jan 2016
- Figure 4. *£10 Brixton Pound* (David Bowie Note) September 2011
- Figure 5. Plan for Brixton Village Market. 2009 Architects image from Stanford Eatwell (Brixton Buzz 2009)
- Figure 6: Drawing from 1936 Planning Application showing the arcade in relation to the Lambeth Carlton Club. (LCC 1926-1958)

1. Introduction

When you take the overground train from Denmark Hill to Clapham Junction you usually pass through Brixton, but you don't stop there. From the railway you get one of the most complete views of neighbourhood which is otherwise hard to get a clear perspective of. The railways which run through the neighbourhood have been part of its history since the first station opened in 1862, with a name which hedged its bets "Brixton and South Stockwell"; that station was on the line which no longer stops in Brixton. The building where the station was now hosts weddings and the occasional consultation workshop. Brixton is a neighbourhood which can only ever be viewed partially, one of the best views to be had of the area is from the perspective of somebody passing between two more affluent areas of South London. It is a neighbourhood which people have moved through and which has a long history of change. This thesis is an account of Brixton, and an account of some of the ways in which the neighbourhood has transformed since 2009. It is an inevitably partial but fine grained view of the tactics and strategies which have been deployed to negotiate the changing neighbourhood, and the social and cultural fallout of these transformations.

1.1. Always different always the same

Brixton isn't the same as it used to be — but Brixton has never remained the same, it is a neighbourhood that has always been a site of change. Brixton Village Market in particular is emblematic of how Brixton is evolving, and is at the centre of many of the debates about gentrification in the area (e.g. Godwin 2013, Lubbock 2013, Bennhold 2014). Since 2010, when Brixton Village Market was listed, it has changed, along with Market Row, from a space partially occupied by incense shops, hairdressers and a few grocers, into one that jostles with fashionable restaurants. The language used to discuss the changes unfolding in Brixton is dominated by a structural, binary model of cataclysm or resurrection. The academy and local interest groups use this model to critique these urban changes, and the state and private financial interest use it to advocate for them. Such notions of change demand a sense of before and after, they require us to imagine that there is such a thing as an 'authentic' neighbourhood form that resides in the future or the past, or often both. I want to try and tease out a more complex portrait of what is happening in Brixton.

The tidy epistemology of before and after persists on all sides of the debate. In this project I will try and critique the role of claims to authenticity in Brixton as a way of challenging the dominant structural discourse of 'what is, what was, what should be'. I am proposing a project which represents the complexity and tensions of the neighbourhood. Notions of authenticity overwrite the multiple and contested cultural imaginations of the neighbourhood. I will suggest that we may consider another notion of authenticity in advocating for what

Brixton is: one that rests on contestation and contradiction rather than stasis. I hypothesise that the claims to authenticity made within the process of neighbourhood change, obscure the complexity of the neighbourhood. I will depict the city as a messy space of contradiction and complexity, and 'authenticity' as a tool for the negotiation of this mess.

Unlike the more structural approach taken by gentrification scholarship, which tends to subscribe to discrete and teleological conceptions of urban change, I wish to look at Brixton as a site rife with conflicting trajectories and identities. I am equally sceptical of notions of the city that focus on society through the lens of the everyday, at the exclusion of structural critique. In my approach I wish to maintain both a critical structural reading of the city, alongside a scale of analysis that sees the city as chaotic and complex.

When a neighbourhood changes people experience alienation, a greater sense of distance from those who they live near and who they encounter in their everyday lives. Alienation is an experience observable beyond the immediate effects of neighbourhood change and I argue in this thesis that it is both a fundamental characteristic of contemporary society and a particular product of neighbourhood change. Claims to authenticity pick one part of a complex web of relationships and attempt to categorise it singularly and coldly in a way that alienates it from other parts of the messy web. In endeavouring to depict the complexity and messiness of the aspects of Brixton observed during this project I hope to expose such alienation. This thesis challenges the apparent authenticity attributed to certain privileged objects, people and communities in Brixton with a complex depiction of the neighbourhood which makes such claims hard to sustain. In doing so I will develop a second notion of authenticity, an authenticity of encounter and not of the symbolic which imagines a politics which rests on an epistemology which appreciates the full sensuous noise of experience.

Primarily though, and aside from any lofty theoretical pursuit, this thesis is one which simply aims to describe a research project in close detail. I wish to write a portrait of Brixton that does not draw clean narratives of analysis through the neighbourhood but accommodates an urban space that is “contrary” and “moody” (Glass 1964:xiii). I suggest that whilst the conceptual grounding of my project is important, the most important contribution that it will make is to create a rich and complex picture of a neighbourhood undergoing change. Besides a little work by Butler and Robson (2001; 2003), and the odd local enthusiast (Piper 2006), there is relatively little scholarly work written on Brixton, and the first aim of this project is to remedy that. I hope that the way in which I go about the project detailed in the remainder of this document, will address urban studies more broadly as to how the academy may approach urban change.

1.2. Research questions

1. How do notions of ‘authentic Brixton’ circulate in the neighbourhood?
2. How does the process of change in Brixton produce experiences of alienation?
3. What roles do alienation and authenticity play in the politics of the neighbourhood?
4. How can Brixton be described in a way which retains its messiness?
5. Can an ‘authentic politics’ be observed and imagined in Brixton?

1.3 The research site - Brixton

Brixton has become iconic of the ways in which neighbourhoods in London have changed. In particular the covered market has been emblematic of gentrification and neighbourhood change in the city. In the 19th century Brixton emerged as a successful suburb, and was particularly important in shaping Britain’s modern retail culture. The recent history of the market and the longer history of the neighbourhood are detailed in chapters 5 and 6. Following a campaign to prevent the demolition of Brixton Village Market the site was listed in 2010 (see chapter 6). This listing led the landlords to employ an agency called *Spacemakers* who helped co-ordinate the ‘regeneration’ of the market through a program of cultural events and free space for new businesses.



Figure 1: Covered Markets in Brixton (Source: Google Maps & Author’s annotations)

Ultimately this has produced a space which is dominated by food businesses which target a young middle class customer. Initial hopes from people involved in this process, including *Spacemakers*, that the market would become an economically viable and inclusive community space, have not been realised. However this thesis will show that it is not a simple case of glossy organised capitalist interests overwhelming a somehow ‘natural’ or ‘authentic’ local space. *London Associated Properties*, who had brought in *Spacemakers* to run the early stages of the market’s renaissance, announced in their *2010 Annual Report* that rents in the two markets had increased by 8% (2010: 13). Whilst ultimately this process has only benefited landlords and a handful of larger businesses below that canopy of economic extraction is a more complex environment. Through spending time working at a restaurant in the market and a series of interviews with business owners I have been able to record some of this complexity.

The restaurant which is one of the two main field sites in this research was founded in 2011 and has in fact closed since the conclusion of the research. It was a business started by two women who had already established a supper club and food blog. It served middle eastern food and fulfils a stereotype of the kind of business which has found success at the market in that its founders are white and middle class and it sells a product influenced by another part of the world. However the ethnographic approach adopted in this thesis has allowed a representation of the restaurant which goes beyond the casual clichés of what a business in a gentrifying area is. My boss at the restaurant, Mary, (who has been anonymised along with everyone who I met during my research) and many colleagues and customers often commented thoughtfully on the ways in which the neighbourhood was changing.

It is the messiness and complexity which emerged from the layers of contrasting interests and opinions which led my research towards its focus on authenticity and alienation as discussed in chapter 2 and 3. It is this messiness which also led me to choose two deliberately contrasting field sites. Despite their geographical proximity the soup kitchen was an opportunity to meet a group of people who were unlikely to spend very much time in the market. This aspect of my fieldwork allowed me to look directly at the consequences of a changing neighbourhood for individuals who lived on the margins of society. Many of the service users at the soup kitchen were addicts or suffered from mental health issues, others were army veterans, ex-offenders, lonely or homeless. Many of the volunteers were or had spent periods of time unemployed, some of them were there as part of mandatory voluntary placements. I chose not to collect quantitative data about the soup kitchen those that rely on the state for their welfare face constant assessment and monitoring in their daily lives. I did not focus on individual biographies but instead allowed my encounters with people at the soup kitchen to frame the account that I recorded.

The soup kitchen fieldwork has allowed me to develop an empirically grounded account of the experience of alienation in a rapidly changing neighbourhood and the role that claims to authenticity play in the way that such alienation and change is negotiated in the everyday. This is discussed in chapters 7 and 8. The following section provides a detailed description of the thesis by chapter.

1.4 The research process.

Whilst the methodological and epistemological basis for this project will be discussed fully in chapter 4 here I provide a brief overview of the research process. My studentship began in 2013 and from as early as October that year I was making preliminary trips to Brixton with the intention of carrying out preliminary research. Given that it was a neighbourhood which had been part of my personal geography of Brixton for as long as I have lived in London my familiarity was at once an asset and an obstacle in finding a way into the neighbourhood to carry out the grounded and ethnographic forms of research I intended.

I attended a protest against the opening of a business called Champagne and Fromage in October 2013 in the pouring rain. Immediately it was apparent that there was no simple binary model (gentrifier/gentrified, local/newcomer, black/white) to be applied in this scenario. A group of mainly white activists protested and security guards and business owners came out to debate with the protestors.

Between that protest and early 2015 I attended a number of local events, consultations, and made several visits to the market as researcher. Many of these events were opportunities for me to build contextual knowledge, such as attending the police organised event “Brixton Unite” a day on which public information stalls on Windrush square were set and sniffer dogs were stationed at the police station in an operation which appeared to have been scaled back after comparisons to the policing which preceded the 1981 riot were made by activists on social media.

It was also during this time that I contacted and interviewed Malcolm Mark and Paul as well as a number of people who worked for the council, a full list of interlocutors appears in Appendix 1. Similarly I learned about the Brixton Soup Kitchen at a fundraising event at Brixton Village Market where I met Mo and learned about their work. These numerous preliminary visits provided context which is either a direct part of this thesis or has informed the thinking and research design of the project more generally.

At the beginning of 2015 the part of my process which I conceptualised as my fieldwork began in earnest. This began with me walking through the market in January with a bag of CVs and visiting restaurants trying to get a job. I met a number of friends who lived in the neighbourhood and walked through the neighbourhood with them by way of learning further about the area. When I did manage to secure employment at the Restaurant my research was valuably structured by the rhythms of hourly paid service work.

The restaurant was a small place which served middle eastern and Mediterranean inspired dishes. I soon became a regular member of staff and I threw myself into a demanding work schedule. Over the months at the restaurant I also came to know various other people from the market. As a waiter and a familiar face in the market I was able to speak to other people in the market with greater understanding, it also gave me access to the workings of a market to an extent which would not have been possible. I continued working there until late August though did subsequently fill in for the odd shift.

In April I made contact with the soup kitchen and volunteered three times in April and May. By June I was a regular on Mondays, and increased my time at the soup kitchen over the summer. Ultimately I was at the soup kitchen three times a week or more until December that year. In my visits to the soup kitchen I got to know a large number of service users. A list of those interlocutors who feature in this thesis appears in Appendix 1.

The list of interlocutors featured in Appendix 1 covers more than 52 people. I met most of these individuals more than once and developed close rapports with many of them. Beyond these people there were numerous other smaller interactions which have figured in the development of this thesis, with customers, friends, visitors to the soup kitchen and volunteers and service users who I did not have the opportunity to get to know.

At various points of the project I met with people from the council and attended consultation and other public events (see appendix 1 & 2). I made a decision not to include most of this material because I wanted to prioritise a non-institutional perspective on the transformation of Brixton. This material did however provide important context as to the processes Brixton was undergoing.

This project is based on a great deal of detailed research and data collection. Not all of which directly features in this thesis, partly due to a desire to focus on a detailed and complex perspective which prioritised a detailed description of my fieldwork over a grand perspective. The more specific methodological and epistemological considerations of this project will be considered more fully in chapter 4.

1.5 *The structure of the thesis.*

Chapter 2 describes the two key theoretical terms in this thesis, alienation and authenticity. It begins by discussing some of the ways in which urban writers have described alienation in the city. In the case of some writers, such as Baudelaire, alienation is almost the defining characteristic of urban experience. The idea of alienation is then developed in relation to Marx's (2000) writing on the term in his 1844 manuscript and traced through human geography via Bertell Ollman (1970) and into contemporary urban research. The chapter attempts to establish alienation as a term which links labour practices to social and cultural experiences of distance. The second half of the chapter explores the notion of authenticity starting with a critique of Sharon Zukin's use of the term (2008; 2009a,b; 2011). With reference to Walter Benjamin (1999a,b) the chapter creates a distinction between alienated and un-alienated forms of authenticity and influenced by Marshall Berman's *Politics of Authenticity* (1971) argues that such a form of authenticity is politically radical. Using the Brixton set novel *Remainder* by Tom McCarthy (2015) to explore the ways in which authenticity and alienation interact with one another. The chapter concludes by arguing that authenticity and alienation are indelibly and complexly intertwined.

In Chapter 3 I discuss other approaches to changing neighbourhoods. Firstly a critique of gentrification scholarship leads to the assertion that this field has tended to neglect the messy and complex aspects of urban neighbourhoods. I argue that there is an inevitable loss in tidying up the phenomena of urban change into clean analytical frameworks. I contrast the arguments from gentrification with more everyday perspectives such as Paul Gilroy's notion of "vernacular dissidence" (2002:108). I argue processes of urban change produce experiences of alienation in the city. Ultimately the chapter is trying to show the value of a conception of the city which does not deny the structural forces that shape urban neighbourhoods but also recognises the messy and oppositional politics of the everyday.

Chapter 4 responds to the epistemological and a methodological challenge set in chapter 3. This chapter sets out an argument for the adoption of a messy epistemology in this thesis. The chapter starts with a close reading of Ruth Glass's essay on London from *London Aspects of Change* (1964) and uses this as the basis for such a messy epistemology. By relating Glass' writing to feminist geography and other theories of complexity, chapter 4 lays out the epistemological position which underpins the methodology used in this project. The remainder of the chapter outlines this methodology and in particular discusses the role of thick description (Geertz 1973) in challenging overly reductionist accounts of social phenomena. The chapter concludes with an ethnographic section about starting fieldwork as a participant observer at the restaurant and the soup kitchen and uses this material as a way to show that the concepts of alienation and authenticity have played an important role in the development of the methodology of this project.

Chapter 5 is the first wholly empirical chapter of the thesis and it is split between a fragmented historical account of Brixton and an ethnographic account of a fractured protest held in 2015. In providing a history of Brixton in fragments I make no claim to completeness and try to represent these historical gobbets as aiming not to build a historical narrative but show different historical ideas of Brixton which continue to resonate in the contemporary discourse. I use this history as the context for a description of a protest which hoped to *Reclaim Brixton* and ask rhetorically – which Brixton do people want to reclaim. The chapter goes on to relate this protest to urban social movement theory and discuss my experience of walking through the protest in relation to alienation as a possible explanation of the protest’s apparent failure. Ultimately I try to suggest that the complex and conflictual nature of the protest may have been an ideal basis for a powerful political movement, but that it sputtered out in the face of a politics of “there is no alternative” (Fisher 2009).

Chapter 6 introduces Brixton Village Market and some of the ways in which it has been transformed since the plans for its demolition first appeared in late 2008. This is a detailed account of the campaign to have it listed and the subsequent regeneration that followed. The chapter interweaves interview material with journalistic and archival sources. The chapter tries to establish what the market is and what it means to protect it. With reference to both the built environment of the market and an ethnographic description of how it was to work there this chapter tries to answer the question – what was being preserved when it was listed? The chapter concludes by suggesting that the market must be seen as primarily a commercial space, but within this commercial environment as with the Parisian Arcades according to Benjamin (1999b) we might find alternative structures and counter-ideas which could be re-animated as a radical everyday.

Chapter 7 focusses on food to explore the kinds of encounter that occur in a complex and changing neighbourhood. With reference to psychoanalytical and anthropological accounts of food the chapter begins by arguing that food is a fundamentally disgusting substance. The fact that it necessarily transgresses borders makes food an ever present if quiet reminder of the abject (Kristeva 1982). This account is interwoven with a series of ethnographic passages about the restaurant and the soup kitchen in which each institution is mediating, or not mediating difference in the context of eating. I argue that alienated authenticity is one way of protecting oneself against the abject nature of food, through the assurance that the food is vouched for by some other authority, whether that is a waiter or culture at large, however this sustains the basic disgustingness of food. I end the chapter by talking about the radical potential in simply eating food, not eating culture or society through it and around it but encountering it through the body alone. To eat with such un-alienated authenticity is to challenge the idea of food as commodity to counteract alienation and perhaps capitalism as a whole.

Chapter 8 is the penultimate chapter and it focuses on the soup kitchen and the ways in which the service users there interact with the state. The chapter starts with a detailed description of the cardgame black jack which I played almost every day there and was an intensely competitive pastime. I relate this game to the game like and oppositional interactions with the state that almost all of the service users at the soup kitchen would describe at one time or another. I argue that this kind of interaction with the state has an intensely alienating affect as those who live on the edges of society have even the most basic means of social re-production seized from them. This argument is related to an account of conspiracy theories and the kinds of political speech which recurred at the soup kitchen. In considering these I suggest that the profound experience of alienation produces such apparent 'irrationality' and that the narratives put forward often seemed less far-fetched in the context of the day to day lives of the service users. Ultimately this chapter argues that through avoiding claims about veracity and making an effort to listen and be on the margins there is an opportunity for a radical politics of the everyday to be heard.

1.6 The purpose of this thesis

This thesis aims to make five key interventions, I will return to them in further detail in the concluding chapter, but I will introduce them briefly here:

1. Create a document of contemporary Brixton which pays detailed attention to the everyday consequences of the processes of change which are effecting the neighbourhood. To produce a political counter-narrative about these processes of change.
2. Advocate for the value of alienation in describing the effects of economic and social structures in the everyday life of the city.
3. Critique the notion of authenticity as it exists in both academic and popular discourses. Draw a distinction between claims to authenticity which produce alienation and authentic encounters which challenge alienation.
4. Challenge the epistemological bases for research into neighbourhood change, particularly those that have tended to characterise gentrification studies. To argue that a messy epistemology benefits the understanding of the urban neighbourhoods and cities in general.
5. To advocate for sustained ethnographic methodologies in order to produce messier forms of knowledge relevant both to academic urban studies and planning and policy research. To illustrate the value of such a methodology in producing a politically critical account of neighbourhood change through the case study of Brixton.

2. Alienation and Authenticity

This chapter will outline the key theoretical concerns of this thesis. These will form the conceptual backdrop for the empirically rich account of the transformation of Brixton, which will be made in the following chapters. In establishing a language of authenticity and alienation I hope to lay the groundwork of a discussion of how the imperative exhibited by many encountered in my fieldwork to seek out ‘authenticity’ of some form was both produced by, and produced opposing experiences of alienation. Starting with a discussion of Marx’s work on alienation I will continue to consider the nature of alienation in the urban context. Following this I will attempt to develop an approach to authenticity which begins with a critique of Sharon Zukin’s use of the term and with reference to alienation develops two different notions of authenticity. Ultimately I will suggest that the two operate in relation to one another; each simultaneously cause and symptom of the other.

2.1 *Alienated from everybody*

Louis Wirth imagined a city of a million mute and miserable Baudelaires. To Wirth the city was a structure that has made a population of passers-by “[t]he superficiality, the anonymity, and the transitory character of urban-social relations” (1938:12). For Wirth this was a condition of urban life, in this miserable assertion he set the tone for a strand of urban studies which has held the city to be the tragic executioner of the folk world of the countryside. In this thesis I will not challenge Wirth on the centrality of alienation in the experience of the modern city – but I will challenge him as to the illness for which this is a symptom, Wirth describes the condition of capitalism without naming it.

In the ethnography that informs this thesis the significance of the moments at which people “rub elbows” (Wirth 1938:12) will be central to the way that I depict the nature of urban life in Brixton. I will describe the ways in which such encounters can produce alienation for the bodies attached. Alienation is the product of urban life only in the sense that the contemporary city may be seen as the product of capital. Walter Benjamin describes Baudelaire’s account of this in *Paris Capital of the 19th Century* (1999b:3-13), the social conditions and the distant, alienated experience that Baudelaire describes bear a strong resemblance to the experience of alienation that Marx has described (2000). This section will develop a description of alienation that links these writers with contemporary urban studies. In this thesis alienation represents a psychological distancing effect that is observable in the rapidly changing neighbourhood of Brixton. I will suggest in this thesis that alienation, linked indelibly to the social and economic conditions of the neighbourhood - is an experience that lies behind the imperative for authenticity which will also emerge from the empirical research to come. Authenticity is on one hand a way of describing the experience of not being alienated, and on the other it is a label which produces

an equal and opposite experience of alienation. Starting from section 2.3 below I will attempt to delineate between the two kinds of authenticity that straddle this dichotomy.

In Marx's 1844 manuscripts, published only in 1932, he draws a direct line between alienation from the means of production and alienation from other people (2000: 81-121). As Marx explains the worker under capitalism produces objects which do not belong to him by means which also do not belong to him. Instead his efforts belong to someone else "Labour produces works of wonder for the rich, but nakedness for the worker" (Marx 2000:88). For Marx "productive life is species-life" (2000:90), it is one and the same as human life – so for a person to be alienated from their means of production is to alienate a person from humankind altogether. It makes a person's body, their nature, their intellect, their "human essence" alien from them (2000:91). Consequently every person is alienated from every other person, the basis for one person to share affinity with another is vastly eroded because "when man is opposed to himself, it is another man that is opposed to him" (2000:91).

In citing these passages from Marx I mean to assert that the alienation that results from the economic conditions of contemporary society are one and the same as the alienation that manifests in the social conditions of contemporary society. In the description of social alienation as it occurs amongst the minutiae of the everyday in Brixton I suggest that we may witness the products of structure as well as individual agency. Social science has tended to approach the quality of urban life as either a consequence of economic structure or the rubbing elbows of different people. Alienation as it is felt by those who grapple with a rapidly changing neighbourhood is not to be subsumed by structural analysis, nor is it less important than the observation of the structures of capital.

Bertell Ollman's 1971 book *Alienation* plays a significant role in Human Geography due to David Harvey's deployment of it in his 1973 text *Social Justice and the City* (2009). Ollman does not stress the same aspects of Marx' 1844 manuscript (2000) as I have done here, Ollman emphasises the nature of alienated man "denuded of all human characteristics" (1971: 153). Ollman here makes alienation a simple process of hollowing out, whereby the alienated person appears without feeling or agency. Ollman does not dwell on the parsing out of humanity into "everyday material industry" in Marx, whereby "we have the objectified faculties of man before us in the form of sensuous, alien, utilitarian objects, in the form of alienation" (2000:101). Here, Marx foreshadows Benjamin's observations of Parisian consumer modernity (1999b), in the sense that rather than a deadening form of alienation that hollows and flattens society there is a chaotic fracturing of the individual into objects of consumption; Benjamin's work will play a far more central role than David Harvey in this thesis. Ollman's significance for David Harvey lies in his emphasis on the importance of "totality" in the thought of Marx (Harvey 2009: 288 referencing Ollman 1971) pointing towards a systemic conception of social life.

Through the fine-grain ethnographic approach of this research project it will become clear that alienation whilst distancing is not deadening. Alienation is a function of capitalism which silences and disappears the radical human politics of the everyday, however that radical politics can be excavated through methodologies which pay strict attention to the quotidian. Ollman's Marxism leads Harvey to see society at a total scale. Ollman's statement regarding totality strikes an absolutist tone which still echoes in the political economy of Harvey and others which has come to transform Human Geography "Reality, being whole and in flux, cannot be grasped in bits and pieces" (Ollman 1971:234). To paraphrase, this thesis inverts this statement from Ollman: reality being complex, whole and in flux, cannot be viewed as a totality (even if it is one).

Whilst I am not attempting to debunk Ollman's (or Harvey's) use of Marx I do wish to suggest that it is limited. It neglects the explosive power of bits and pieces to illuminate society in its totality – an epistemology which inverts rather than destroys Harvey's. But in the 1844 manuscript Marx makes it clear that the psychology and the everyday life of people is a vital aspect of how we comprehend society;

It can be seen how the history of industry and its previous objective existence is an open book of man's faculties and his psychology available to view. It was previously not conceived of in its connection with man's essence but only under the exterior aspect of utility (2000:101).

Whilst Harvey makes a powerful argument as to the value of considering society as a totality and concentrating on discovering "the transformation rules" (2009: 289) that order it, I suggest that the everyday scale can provide an alternative and equally valuable way to approach society. In this thesis, I will examine the social consequences of a rapidly changing neighbourhood under capitalism, alienation will be a crucial concept in this analysis. In Chapter 3 I will outline a more detailed critique of gentrification scholarship, but at this point it is valuable to draw a line of connection between Harvey's Marxism and that field of work. There is already ample powerful structural analysis which neglects the "bits and pieces" (Ollman 1971:234) of the neighbourhood, instead I will carry out my research through a microscope and not a telescope.

Regarding alienation will require me to develop the way that I deploy the concept in the city in an alternative direction to that laid out by Ollman and Wirth. In the remainder of this section I will discuss Benjamin and Baudelaire as a means to cement the connection I wish to make between alienation, the city and the everyday.

*Suddenly flooded the memory's dark soil
As I was crossing the new Place du Carrousel
The old Paris is gone (the face of a town
Is more changeable than the heart of mortal man)*
(1989: 109)

This stanza is a moment from *The Swan* printed in 1861 and part of the 18 poems which make up the *Parisian Scenes* section of *Flowers of Evil (Les Fleurs du Mal)* (Baudelaire 1989: 105-132). The poet is brought close to death by the experience of walking through the rapidly changing city of Paris in the Poem *The Dance of Death*. The walker described by Baudelaire as “frolicking about” cannot even see “The Angel’s trumpet, on the point of pealing” (1989:125). Baudelaire’s gaze falling on the city is “the gaze of alienated man” (Benjamin 1999b:10), he is suffering a psychological alienation as he drifts through the streets and witnesses true penury and death; “the gaze of the flaneur, whose way of life still conceals behind a mitigating nimbus the coming desolation of the big-city dweller” (1999b:10).

Baudelaire is watching Paris enter modernity from an ambiguous and distanced perspective, “stood at the threshold - of the metropolis as of the middle class” (Benjamin 1999b:10) is observing the void that lies between increasing destitution and the luxury and new domination of the streets by the wealthy. In his observations of the city Baudelaire, though perhaps unwittingly, is witnessing the ambiguity of the moment: “the law of dialectics at a standstill” (Benjamin 1999b:10). Benjamin is suggesting that there is something about this moment of rapid change which has exposed the dialectic at the heart of society. The transformation of the city is creating alienation, it is creating ambiguity and it is exposing a utopian dream-image. However this image of utopia is provided by “commodity [...] as fetish” (1999b:10). For Benjamin the alienation of the flaneur is linked indelibly to the alienation of the worker through the commodity fetish; the transformation of the city into the modern image of the commodity is in progress and this produces an alienation which brings the reality of society into view only that the viewer can find a way to ignore it. Benjamin’s *Paris – Capital of Modernity* depicts the city as ambiguous, shifting, exciting – Baudelaire reveals a momentary image of another possible city. However Benjamin finishes the section on Baudelaire with reference to Wagner and the total work of art (1999b:11) and finishes the essay with a crushing depiction of Baron von Haussmann and “his hatred for the rootless” (1999b:12) and we see how the ambiguity that Baudelaire revelled in was the ideal prologue to Haussmann’s crushing ‘rationalisation’ of the city.

David Harvey and Louis Wirth are at opposite poles of urban studies. Yet they have in common a drive to identify the organising principles of the city whether it is “the transformation rules” (2009: 289) or “essential determinants” (1938:7), in this sense they share a basic epistemology. An epistemology which even if it aims to challenge the rationalisation of the city by capitalism which Benjamin exemplarised in the image of Haussmann, it fails to challenge the basic totalising concept of the city. In the following chapter I will advocate for an alternative epistemology drawing on Ruth Glass among others, which makes efforts to accommodate mess, contradiction, and incompleteness. In terms of alienation, Wirth equates alienation to an experience of the speed and density of the city, Harvey is more concerned with the way that alienation relates to labour, and economic structure relates to urban experience. Referring to Marx’s 1844 (2000) manuscript I wish to pursue a

psychic alienation that results from the economic side of alienation which has been emphasised by Ollman and Harvey. I wish to follow Benjamin in identifying the complex ambiguity of the modern city and the fear and alienation that it can produce. Later in this chapter I will connect this alienation to the search for authenticity via the commodity, or the ‘dream image’.

2.2 Alienated from them

In this section I wish to talk about the alienation that occurs between people, individuals and groups. In the previous section I tried to show how structural alienation could be equated to a psychological experience of alienation from an anonymous or generalised other. In this section I wish to speak about more blatant forms of alienation whether it be a social or cultural process. However I want to suggest that this is not a separate phenomenon but in fact utterly related to the more generalised forms of alienation already discussed. I will make this argument through three brief references; territorial stigma, urban fear, and racism in public. In doing so I will first argue that these phenomena might broadly be categorised as alienation and linked to the discussion in the first section of this chapter; second I will suggest that the notion of ‘authenticity’ plays a role in each of these examples. Authenticity will be the concept that is explored in following sections of this chapter and I will argue that the dynamic of claim and counterclaim which produces experiences of alienation and ‘authentic’ positions is a dynamic which can be seen as a product of a capitalist society.

Loic Wacquant has outlined the power of geography in the alienation of social groups via the accumulation of negative associations of a given neighbourhood (2007). He states that such stigmatisation results in internal fissures developing as the “faceless demonised other” such as the drug dealer, or even simply, the people that live downstairs become identified with the problems of the neighbourhood (2007:68). Wacquant argues that such stigmatisation damages a neighbourhood, although he is careful to state that “there was never a “golden age”” (2007:69). He describes this damage as a “dissolution of place” which annihilates the sense of identity in the given area leaving it seen as an empty space awaiting a transformation (2007:69). He calls this the “objective fragmentation of today’s urban poor” (2007:72) the fracturing of possible communities of resistance through consistent stigmatisation. In other words, the fomentation of alienation.

Hamish Kallin and Tom Slater have documented the activation of stigma in order to justify “thorough class transformation” (2014:1353) in the Craigmillar neighbourhood of Edinburgh. Their fieldwork reveals a clear case of social stigmatisation, and the instrumentalisation of this stigma for development, the council claiming that they wanted Craigmillar to be “a place, not just a housing estate” (2014:1357). The community’s organised efforts to counter the negative discourse of their neighbourhood were dismantled, the authors write “breaking

up the most powerful community group in the area a year before deciding to send in bulldozers was very convenient” (2014:1357). The importance of alienation, of an area and of the members of the community from each other, is clear in these examples of territorial stigma. The notion that deprivation is the responsibility not of society as a whole but of the deprived neighbourhood itself, and in turn the “demonised other” (Wacquant 2007:68) can be read as a twisted inversion of the worker’s alienation from his own labour and the objects he produces as Marx describes it (2000). Wacquant contrasts the “Precariat” of those communities he describes with the “Proletariat in the Marxist vision of history” (2007:73), I suggest however that the processes he describes are within a conceptual continuity with Marx’s description of the alienation of the worker.

Urban fear is the second phenomena which I wish to use to illustrate the centrality of alienation in processes of urban change. In the United States, one year after Reagan came to power with the era of reagonomics underway, with all its destructive effect on welfare and all its emphasis on the individual James Wilson and George Kelling published their influential reflection on urban crime *Broken Windows* (1982). This publication claimed an indelible link between the condition of the built environment of a given place and its safety. Within this thesis was the worthy intention of preventing crime rather than punishing it, however it also had the significant effect of cementing a criminalisation of those areas of the city that had fallen into disrepair, through the inaction of the state or property owners rather than the action of the community. In the 1990s Setha Low documented some of the consequences of the fear that had developed in relation to the city in her work on the gated communities that had grown on the margins of cities in the United States (1997,2001). She suggested that the middle classes were moving into gated communities out of a generalised fear of the city. Low imagined that the “city of the future will be partitioned into gated enclaves segregated by race and class” (1997:54). She was surprised to find that the gated communities where she carried out her research were not sought out for their tight knit communities, but that they were “a retreat from society, from neighbourhood, from responsibility” (1997:67) and even more menacingly that they were a “refuge from diversity” (2001:56). If the dream of Ash Amin where public spaces are designed to become “charismatic crossings” (2015:255) represents a social ideal, something like the total social accountability of Jane Jacobs’ idealised Greenwich Village (1992) then to retreat inside and seek out segregation is to embrace the alienated urban life that Wirth (1938) so regretted.

Margaret Thatcher bought a home in a gated community in Dulwich in South London in 1981 (Minton 2012: 181) and the final years of her prime ministership saw the institution of *Secured By Design* the police programme that advocates “designing out crime” (Secured By Design website 2016). In *Ground Control* (2012) Anna Minton has documented how the ‘gating’ of communities fits within a broader response to urban fear that has led to planners, developers, and individuals to build fear into the fabric of the city. Those that are able to are consciously seeking to alienate themselves from those faceless threats that they perceive to dwell in the city. In this way social divisions are being reified as the very streets and homes that we live in. These policies have

coincided in the UK with the slow death of social housing and a renewed emphasis on home ownership that has contributed to the desperate land grab which results in spiralling house prices in neighbourhoods such as Brixton. The drive for the middle classes to separate themselves off from the deprivation which exists in cities is manifest not just in gates and security cameras, but in walls themselves. To seek separation, even if that separation is sought *for* a community, is to make a distinction between one alienated place and another.

Public space where people rub elbows may represent an ideal but in contemporary Britain it is in public spaces where alienation is made horribly visible. The third phenomena I will highlight is public racism. In 2011 a video was posted on YouTube which showed the racist rant that Emma West unleashed on a Croydon tram. This video, uploaded in November 2011, months after the London riots, has now faded in memory due to a steady flow of such incidents. The proliferation of video recording technology has meant that the continued violent presence of racist attitudes in British public space is very clear. In his reflections on the video Paul Gilroy (2012) links this event with the political discussion over multiculturalism and its apparent failure, a topic which will be dealt with in greater detail in chapter 3 of this thesis. Gilroy calls Britain's current "lived multiculturalism [...]" a zombie phenomenon" (2012:384). Gilroy suggests that like the zombies, multiculturalism represents an uncontrollable, unquashable force that reveals "the historically unprecedented perils and corrupting cultural contamination of unfree, creole formations" (2012:384). In the tropical horror of the zombie Gilroy identifies a power which is terrifying to others yet not in possession of itself. For Gilroy, diversity or multiculturalism in Britain, like the zombie, the successor to Frankenstein's monster, represents "the de-stabilising agency of the proletariat" (Gilroy 2012:384 citing Warner 2004, 2006).

Gilroy cites a speech that David Cameron gave at the beginning of 2011, in which he proclaimed an era of "muscular liberalism" (Cameron 2011). The speech condemns a historic document of "state multiculturalism" he suggests that this has led to an unwillingness to condemn the views of those who are not white when they fail to live up to British "values" (Cameron 2011). Cameron's answer to the "intimidating multiculturalist ideology" by which a white person may not speak up out of fear that they are "unjustly labelled a racist" (Gilroy 2012:285) is that there should be a set of British "values" to which all citizens are held: "to belong here is to believe in these things" (Cameron 2011).

There are a number of crucial issues to unpack here. The public space of the tram is a space of constant encounter, such encounter can both expose and bridge the fissures in a diverse society. In the video the woman's claims are countered by multiple other notions of identity, motherhood, blackness, Britishness, and Polishness. The zombie in Gilroy's analogy might be described as a figure of total alienation; from the body, from society, from their own agency – reduced to a technology deployed by a powerful other. Cameron's depiction of contemporary Britain makes a clear and false divide between 'white-British' values and "the rest"

(Gilroy 2012:385) Cameron's fear is that the 'white' citizen becomes alienated in the face of diversity, he makes himself the "muscular" liberal who can protect them with the force of the state to instil "British values" (Cameron 2011). As such Cameron essentially advocates for a multicultural policy to be replaced with one of "assimilationism" (Gilroy 2012:287); here in a process that resembles the alienation that workers face from their means of production (Marx 2000) the individual cedes control of their 'values' in order to be a citizen, part of the machinery of the state. This menacing discourse makes difference a threat to society; the answer to this threat is to ensure universal alienation from certain aspects of social life, giving over the means of thinking, the means for encounter, in order that they might be better managed by somebody else.

In this section I have used three brief case studies to highlight the ways in which contemporary society is defined by alienation, alienation which is simultaneously cultural, social, and economic. Urban space is definitive of such alienation. However Cameron's speech and the rant by Emma West both display that the misattribution of blame for the divisions in society have led only to further alienating discourse and policy making. When Emma West said "my Britain is fuck all" she felt that immigration had taken 'her' country away from her (quoted by Gilroy 2012:392). In her ironic tactic of taking possession only to mourn the loss of possession there is a graspingness, as if Emma West, adrift and feeling alone on the tram can only find security in her possession of an imaginary Britain. In chapter 5 when I discuss the protest held in Brixton titled "Reclaim Brixton" there will be a twisted similarity to these positions. To imply that both Emma West and the people on the bus that were the focus of her ire are in a position of alienation is not to excuse her position; only to say that they are occurring within the same social world in which alienation is unequally distributed but universal. In the next section of this chapter I will suggest that alienation results in claims to authenticity, and these claims are a means through which power is expressed whether it is by a developer in Edinburgh, a resident of a gated community or the Prime Minister. In the account I make of neighbourhood change in Brixton these two terms will be essential. I will also try to make an account of un-alienated authenticity; a radically different concept contained in the same word, that may point to moments of radical possibility in the messiness of Brixton and perhaps the contemporary city at large.

2.3. Authenticity and neighbourhood change, a critique of Sharon Zukin

In her 2008 journal article 'Consuming Authenticity' the urban sociologist Sharon Zukin makes a very considered analysis of claims to authenticity in the city. She makes it extremely clear that this claim is often brought to bear in the name of heritage by community groups such as the Brooklyn Heights Association in New York. In these cases, she says it serves only to give "consumption practices of gentrifiers the force of the law" (2008:743). She states explicitly that the manipulation of authenticity in consumption spaces enables "new

residents to stake their own claim to the neighbourhood” (Zukin 2008:734). This kind of manipulation of authenticity may distance residents from the mainstream; it “creates a safe zone for non-conformity, it also develops new means of commodifying the spaces themselves” and amounts to “excluding others from these new spaces of consumption” (2008:745). In this article Zukin appears very single minded in her critique of certain claims to authenticity in urban space. She links it clearly to the kind of hipster consumption practices she has highlighted well elsewhere (Zukin, Trujillo, et al. 2009). However in other places Zukin has made it clear that she thinks the notion of Authenticity remains valuable in the city.

In *Naked City* (2009b) she directly connects the appeal of authenticity to an analysis of Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). In an article (2009a) Zukin emphasises that whilst Jacobs' romanticised image of the “Urban Village” advocated the kind of “rootedness” that Zukin also speaks of, in her dislike for large scale planning Jacobs left the door open to the incremental interventions that have since been made by higher income residents which ultimately “grease the wheels” (Zukin 2009a:549) of developers' projects. Zukin suggests that without the state interventions that Jacobs deplored the dream of the urban village will only lead the city to be gentrified and commodified. I agree with Zukin when she writes that “the claim to see or embody authenticity is not only a claim of moral superiority; it is a cultural lever for claiming space” (2009a:551). However she then goes on to introduce some peculiar sideways choreography into her dance with authenticity. With apparently nothing more than hope to drive her on she dreams of:

a new rhetoric of authenticity that avoids any sort of fundamentalism, it would offer a platform for broad coalitions to prevent continued up-scaling and displacement. To achieve this we must politicize the meaning of authenticity to include the right to put down roots, a moral right to live and work in a space, not just consume it (2009a:552).

Undoubtedly her aims are laudable, yet following such a measured analysis of authenticity's value in attempts to farm the city for capital, it is surprising that she then spins on a dime to rehabilitate it. She gives very little idea of how she might achieve this. It seems hard to imagine that claims to authenticity might not always lead us to the delectable image of the urban village. When in *Naked City* she wonders whether “if mom-and-pop stores are more ‘authentic’ than big box chains, the state should mandate their inclusion in every new building project and in every shopping block.” (2009b:245). Surely this sort of odd policy recommendation veers inevitably towards Jane Jacobs' social and moral conservatism. It is nostalgic – with Zukin as with Jacobs we are doomed to a city that is a fossil formed over generations in flaky sedimentary stone.

Zukin takes a paradoxical stance regarding authenticity, at times idealising it as a means to produce an ideal urbanism and others criticising its instrumentalisation. Her erroneous reading of Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1999a) may reveal the thinking behind this. She compares the loss of

authenticity through the sort of urban change that she has anatomised so well to Benjamin's configuration of the loss of aura. Yet even though Benjamin speaks nostalgically of the demise of the auratic days of “art pour l'art” he terms aura as a function of art's “parasitical dependence on ritual” (1999a:218). Benjamin heralds the annihilation of the “theology of art” (1999a:218). It is a eulogy of sorts, but not a grateful one. Zukin, like Jacobs, subscribes to the theology that imagines an original and authentic urban form out there to be reclaimed. Authenticity is a sacrament of the theology of the city. It is hard to believe that Zukin read 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' at all when one reads Benjamin writing:

the instant criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics. (Benjamin 1999a:218)

She is also incorrect to compare Benjamin's mechanical reproduction to the “renewal and revitalization since Jane Jacobs' time” (Zukin 2009b:220). Rather than being the basis for any kind of reconciliation between the city and authenticity, Zukin's reading of Benjamin shows that she is, like Jacobs, only serving to maintain the wrapper that conceals “the shock effect” (Benjamin 1999a: 232).

Zukin's efforts to rehabilitate the notion of authenticity may have been more successful had she broke down the concept clearly. Authenticity is a term that denotes vague and disparate ideas. For the purposes of this thesis I am going to propose a split, on one side a semiotic authenticity, an authenticity that derives from an object's perceived relation to a signifier or another referent. On the other side a phenomenological authenticity, an authenticity that exists between the object and the subject, in which any social or cultural meanings are secondary to an ‘authentic’ encounter with an object. Benjamin (1999a) kills off semiotic authenticity when he kills off aura, the notion that an object's value is derived from its origins, and that this value is translated into commodity value. What emerges however, following the “dynamite of the tenth of the second” (Benjamin 1999a:229) is something akin to the phenomenological authenticity that I am tentatively proposing, and that I will develop in the following section.

2.4 Authenticity and encounter

To live is not to breathe; it is to act it is to make use of our organs, our senses, our faculties, of all the parts of ourselves which give us the sentiment of our existence (Rousseau 1979:42).

Rousseau's *Emile* challenges us to imagine a form of education which would counter the alienating circumstances of modernity as it was emerging in the Paris of the 18th century. Marshall Berman has written at length about Rousseau in his book *The Politics of Authenticity*; rather than living through their bodies and their senses Berman explains that Rousseau saw around him “modern men were divided against themselves [...]: their sensitivity and imagination, their thought and action, all were abstracted from the feelings and needs of

the self, and directed instead towards the ends which the marketplace imposed” (1971:173). Rousseau is undoubtedly preoccupied with the plight of the wealthier echelons of society, however this abstraction of the body chimes utterly with Marx’s comments on the objectification of the “faculties of man” (2001:101) discussed above.

The irony in Rousseau’s authentic life is fully realised in *Julie* (2010) an epistolary novel that ends with its eponymous protagonist, having shunned her love and correspondent Saint-Preux writing him a final letter admitting that her decision to turn away from him had not given her what she desired. She sought security in an alternative relationship in order to allow her to more fully be herself in other ways, yet that security proved to be “psychically destructive for her” (Berman 1971: 264).

“Ironically, then, the search for authenticity both generates its antithesis and makes that antithesis unviable, even fatal, in the end we must get out of this bind somehow if we want to write a happier ending” (Berman 1971:264)

Here Berman suggests that the cautionary tale of Julie illustrates the bind that exists at the heart of the search for authenticity within the society of Rousseau, and perhaps also the society of today.

Within the context of this chapter, one might paraphrase and adapt this irony in the following way. In a capitalist society we all experience alienation from one and another and from ourselves, this state leads us to crave a sense of authenticity which we can cling on to. Due to our mutual alienation we cannot find authenticity in ourselves so we seek it in others, in objects, in property, even as we reach towards a dream-image of authentic life we do not recognise that such a fantasy cannot exist as a commodity (cf. Benjamin 1999b, Buck Morss 1991). Here are the two forms of authenticity that will become central to my account of my empirical research. First, semiotic authenticity, an image of self, or an image that we can append to ourselves to feel like we are connected to something in the world. Second, phenomenological authenticity the authenticity of experience an actual unmediated encounter – largely made impossible by the fact that every object and every person we encounter is itself alienated. Or alternatively these two forms of authenticity could be thought of as alienated authenticity and un-alienated authenticity, these are the terms I will use throughout this thesis. This terminology reflects the notion developed in this chapter that experiences of alienation and experiences of authenticity are interlinked.

In this thesis alienated authenticity will refer to the form of authenticity that rests on the past and the elsewhere. This is a form of authenticity whereby an object acquires an authentic quality through imitation, repetition, and ritual. Berman writes about Rousseau's opposition of habit and authenticity, Berman tells us that for Rousseau “The essence of habit was imitation” (1971:175). This recalls Benjamin's (1999a) linking of Ritual and the sort

of authentic, auratic object that he described. This is the kind of hipster authenticity which Zukin warns us against and then attempts to rehabilitate. The reason that this is referred to as alienated authenticity is that it will be seen in this thesis to be deployed in order to negotiate alienation, but also to produce it. At the heart of the notion of hipster-ism is the tethering of commodities to external referents which create an enchanting effect or aura (Benjamin 1999a), through this means the alienated experience of living in a changing neighbourhood, of being out of place, of feeling rootless, is remedied by the construction of distant roots. Craft beer therefore is the fantasy of a product which produced by someone who is not alienated from their means of production, a fantasy which is just that - a dream or enchantment which protects one from the horrors of the contemporary city - rather like the fake gas flame that disguised early electric lights in Paris (Benjamin 1999:167).

On the other hand is un-alienated authenticity, an authenticity which belongs to a subject “freed from the burdens of the past, controlled entirely by the self's own desire and choice” (Berman 1971:177). This is the authenticity that follows Benjamin's aura destroying dynamite (Benjamin 1999a:229), it is an authenticity of the present. For Berman and Rousseau this kind of authenticity is literally the opposite of the kind of auratic authenticity described in the paragraph above. This authenticity is one that throws off the shackles of tradition and moves in to the world “tied to no one place” and who “knows no law but his own will” and is subsequently “forced to reason at every steps he takes” (Rousseau's *Emile* (1979) cited by Berman 1971:176). This seems like the person who is constantly confronted by Benjamin's “shock effect” (1999:232). This Rousseau-ian subject demonstrates an authenticity of action not of stasis. For the purposes of this thesis un-alienated authenticity refers to a state of constant encounter whereby one does not allow one's sense of self or other to rest on imperceivable phantom referents but instead allows knowledge to emerge from a sensuous and imminent experience.

To simply imply that one form of authenticity should be substituted for the other is a pointless claim. However whilst these two forms are conceptually distinct, they are wrapped in a dialectical relationship. This relationship is an echo of Marx's line “All that is solid melts into air” (cited by Berman as the title of his 1982 book). The ossified object and the ever melting subject finally collapsing into one another perhaps leaving us “at [...] last forced to face [...] the real conditions of their lives and their relations with fellow men” (cited in Berman 1982:21). In this sense this thesis pursues knowledge of the specific which emerges from the sensuous and the complex because it is through this form of knowledge that a radical, un-alienated, and authentic politics may emerge. In contrast to Ollman (1971) and Harvey (2009) this thesis contends that an account of society that rests solely on a total and generalisable model loses sight of the un-alienated politics that occurs in the specific register of the un-generalisable.

2.5 Authenticity under a glass roof

Where can we identify these two forms of authenticity in the city? How does it relate to alienation in practice? As has become characteristic of this chapter I will start off in Paris, via Walter Benjamin's arcades project. His description of the commodity in modern Paris as circulated through the covered streets of the arcade forms the ideal case study for the dynamic between what I am calling alienated and unalienated forms of authenticity. The fact that this work concentrates on urban spaces that pre-empt the arcades and covered markets of Brixton which play a significant role in my empirical work makes it an even more valuable reference. I will introduce a brief vignette from my empirical research which I hope will begin to show how this theoretical chapter will come to inform the grounded research which constitutes the majority of this project. In 1927 Benjamin started work on the grand *Arcades Project* (1999b). In 1940 when he was killed trying to escape France, where he had sought refuge from Nazism, the work remained unfinished and was only published in its entirety in 1982. Whilst it is impossible to imagine the state that Benjamin would have seen it published in, its fragmentary nature has a radical quality in itself, and the methodology of montage is one that Benjamin deployed elsewhere, notably in *One Way Street* (1997). What remains are notes that run to 900 pages composed of fragments of historical and literary material. In their introduction to the English translation Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin suggest that what exists in the project is more than a set of notes, it was a project which whatever Benjamin's ultimate intentions for it had become "an end in itself" which had the aim of "blasting apart [...] historical pragmatism – grounded, as this always is, on the premise of a continuous and homogenous temporality" (Benjamin 1999: xi). In Susan Buck Morss' introduction to her book *Dialectics of Seeing*, which is not a summary but more like a re/construction of the Arcades project, she asks the reader for "an openness to the proposition that the common, everyday objects of industrial culture have as much of value to teach us as that canon of cultural "treasures" which we have for so long been taught to revere" (1991: xi). In its discussion of the commodity, its relevance to the discussion of alienation and authenticity in this thesis, its effort to develop a radical epistemology, and its fragmentary and explosive methodology *The Arcades Project* (1999b) and Buck Morss' project (1991) have a significant influence for this thesis.

In the bourgeois commodities of the Parisian Arcades, and the technological developments of the era, in art and in architecture Benjamin identified a tendency for the new to arrive and consistently refer backwards to a utopia constructed from the past. Benjamin wrote "There is an effort to master the new experiences of the city within the framework of the old traditional experiences of nature" (1999b:447). In today's context we might think about the 'Paleo Diet' the notion that to eat like a Neolithic person is healthier than any other diet or the High Line in New York's prairie planting on the skeleton of an abandoned rail line (see Lindner & Rosa 2017). When electric lighting was introduced to Paris it was given the shape of a gas flame (Benjamin 1999:167) this

twist towards the past is evident today in the very fact that Brixton Village Market has not been demolished, or that the vinyl record paired with download code is the musical commodity for the music nerd of the moment. Buck Morss explains that in the association of contemporary commodity with images of the past, or even pre-historic nature Benjamin saw “collective wish images” which have been inscribed “on the new means of production an ur-image of the desired social ends of their development” (Buck Morss 1991:117).

During fieldwork a man came into the shop of the person I was interviewing with a new loaf of bread; he was trying to come up with a name for it, he gave us both chunks to try. He was an old friend of the shop owner. He was apparently one of the great pioneers of the ‘real bread’ movement, even going so far as to grind his own wheat at his London home, he was thinking of naming this loaf after a historical naval battle. In Brixton village market it has become increasingly difficult to get hold of bread that isn’t ‘artisanal’. At the pizza restaurant in Market Row, Franco Manca, their menu relates their pizza making process to one “originally developed by the Greek settlers who, in the 5th century BC founded Neapolis (New Town)” (Franco Manca 2016). The emphasis on the archaic that accompanies expensive bread in Brixton today is a claim to authenticity which is made to explain the product’s increased exchange value – it is a pantomime that serves to costume the brute nature of commerce, to persuade the purchaser that they are consuming an un-alienated form of labour. The beer at Franco Manca is even branded as “No Logo” a transparently ironic claim that the commodity you are consuming is somehow not being marketed to you, or perhaps a bizarre reference to Naomi Klein (2001).

In the example of the label of ‘artisan’, just one of the many claims to authenticity that are made about commodities available in Brixton village market, we can also say that the image of the ‘artisan’ is an image of archaic utopia by which the worker is happily producing a commodity. When we see wish images attach “themselves as surface ornamentation” (Buck Morss 1991:117) what we are seeing is the same as claiming authenticity through referent to an external symbol, the alienated authenticity I have already discussed. For Benjamin there is a revolutionary power in the utopian images that accompany the commodities of Paris in modernity, perhaps that pertains also in Brixton. However these images were not revolutionary in themselves because society is not capable of comprehending their power:

The collective is not even aware that it is dreaming – with the inevitable result that symbol turns into fetish, and technology, the means for realizing human dreams is mistaken for their actualization (Buck Morss 1991:118).

For Benjamin part of the Arcades project was to bring the commodity into a dialectic that would awaken the revolutionary possibilities contained in the utopian fantasy that accompanied them into the marketplace.

It is not possible to ‘apply’ Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* to Brixton, even insofar as we might imagine that his intentions for the project are actually comprehensible by Susan Buck Morss or anybody else. However it is valuable in developing the conceptual terrain which informs the methodology, analysis, and epistemology of this thesis. However the approach taken by Benjamin was to reveal the political power that was hidden in plain view in the form of everyday life in modernity. I suggest that in ways that resemble the case of the Parisian arcades, new capital has rolled into Brixton as an alienating force wrapped up in a utopian image. Benjamin hoped that “precisely by giving up nostalgic mimicking of the past and paying strict attention to the new nature, the ur-images are reanimated” (Buck Morss 1991:146). Looking at this statement in the context of the terminology this chapter has attempted to develop, we can somewhat expand it to say the following: by refusing the claims to authenticity that rest on external referents, and focusing instead on the encounter between subject and object we might uncover a politics of un-alienated authenticity through which we can establish a productive discussion about the shape of the contemporary city.

2.6 *Re-enacting Authenticity: Tom McCarthy’s Remainder*

My aim in this thesis has not been to establish a strict theoretical nomenclature to apply to my fieldwork; instead it has emerged from my empirical research. Alienation and authenticity are terms that have been useful to me throughout my research process and I have found myself returning to them in varied contexts in Brixton. This chapter has primarily intended to occupy and stretch these terms, establishing their limits and developing careful distinctions within this conceptual terrain. Alienation and authenticity will appear throughout this thesis as entangled terms, each one altering or producing the other, resulting not in a static theoretical position but a fluid and complex analysis which shadows the complexity of my data rather than attempting to wrestle it into a coherent and ordered structure. In the following chapter I will outline both the epistemology and methodology that have allowed me to preserve the messiness of a changing neighbourhood as I have encountered in Brixton. It would be sleight of hand to state that the theoretical efforts made in this paper can be left without any further clarification however. Rather than doing this through systematic enumerated statements, or carefully constructed diagrams I will provide a conclusion through discussion of Tom McCarthy’s novel *Remainder* (2015) set in Brixton which was first published in 2005. Given the material in the remainder of this thesis it is appropriate to use a narrative form to bind together the theoretical discussions above.

The novel features a protagonist with no name, this protagonist has suffered a terrible accident in the street in Brixton, hit by debris from an unnamed source. We are told that he broke many bones and was in a coma for

a month. He seems not to fully comprehend the source of the debris, however he took on a lawyer to seek compensation and has been awarded £8.5million. The accident left him having to learn to move again, the protagonist and narrator recalls the experience of having to first be taught the theory of what is involved in picking up a carrot, to visualise it, to understand the muscle mechanics of the action, and then being encouraged to put it into action under the supervision of his physiotherapist.

I closed my fingers round the carrot. It felt – well, it felt: that was enough to start short-circuiting the operation. It had texture; it had mass. The whole week I'd been gearing up to lift it, I'd thought of my hand, my fingers, my rerouted brain as active agents, and the carrot as a no-thing – a hollow, a carved space for me to grasp and move. The carrot though was more active than me” (McCarthy 2015:20).

He recovers but is alienated from his own body, all of the muscle memories accrued during his life had to be re-built and he is left external to his own movements. The protagonist watches *Mean Streets* (Scorsese 1973) with his friend Greg and finds himself struck by the ease and authenticity with which Robert De Niro's character does things

Every move he made, each gesture was perfect, seamless. Whether it was lighting up a cigarette or opening a fridge door or just walking down the street; he seemed to execute the action perfectly, to live it, to merge with it until he was it and it was him and there was nothing in between [...] “He’s natural when he does things. Not artificial, like me. He’s flaccid. I’m plastic” (McCarthy 2015:22)

In these early pages of the book McCarthy's protagonist finds in film the fantasy-image of authentic embodiment. The dream of having an authentic presence in and encounter with the world is appealing in a way which he cannot explain to his friend. De Niro represents un-burdened authenticity “controlled entirely by the self's own desire and choice” (Berman 1971:177) where De Niro's character simply and authentically is.

Of course De Niro's character in *Mean Streets* (Scorsese 1973) is not authentic, he is a facsimile. As in Berman's discussion of Rousseau, imitation is the very antithesis of authenticity (1971:175), or in another sense it is an example of alienated authenticity. De Niro's character's actions in *Mean Streets* are synthetic, yet we are lead to believe that they are in fact authentic, the choice of De Niro is not incidental as he is one of the the iconic figures of method acting. For McCarthy's protagonist De Niro is a utopian dream image of the authentic life, in the commodity of the image on the screen the protagonist believes he has identified the form of authentic embodiment that he wishes to rediscover for himself. The protagonist's friend Greg tries to convince him that he is wrong to idealise the film as a model of authenticity “You're just more usual than everyone else” (McCarthy 2015:23), reflecting on the conversation the protagonist agrees but remains unsatisfied:

I'd always been inauthentic. Even before the accident, if I'd been walking down the street just like De Niro, smoking a cigarette like him, and even if it had lit first try, I'd still be thinking: Here I am, walking down the street, smoking

a cigarette, like someone in a film. *See? Second-hand. The people in the films aren't thinking that. They're just doing their thing, real, not thinking anything.* (McCarthy 2015:23)

He concludes, agreeing with his friend but not in a way that his friend would have agreed with himself, that his accident has “just made me become even more what I’d always been anyway, added another layer of distance between me and things I did” (McCarthy 2015:23). The realisation that De Niro’s character’s apparent authenticity does not reflect the nature of real life only serves to make the novel’s protagonist identify that he has always felt distant from himself, he has always felt alienated. What he craves, in the form of the way that people are in films, is an alienated authenticity, an imitation of the authentic. Like the Parisians in the *Arcades Project* (Benjamin 1999) consuming commodities which have inscribed upon them a utopian image of the future the protagonist of *Remainder* (McCarthy 2015) fantasises that he might find authenticity through *Mean Streets* (Scorsese 1973) that this contains the secret for authenticity – that through carefully re-enacting reality he can actually perfect it. In contrast we saw above that Rousseau saw habit and imitation as the very antithesis of authenticity (Berman 1971:175), and as the novel continues they prove to be as unsatisfying for the protagonist.

With his compensation money and the goal of finding a sense of ease and authenticity the protagonist in *Remainder* (McCarthy 2015) undertakes the first of a series of elaborate projects. Having experienced acute déjà-vu at a party in Brixton at the sight of a large crack in the wall he decides to re-create the ‘memory’ that he has uncovered. A tenement house in which he is on the top floor, below him an old woman cooking liver, below them a pianist practising all day, other residents were a boring couple and a motorcycle enthusiast. With the aid of a genius bureaucrat called Naz he assembles the large team required to make this happen, including cat wranglers to place the animals onto the roof opposite and replace them when they fall to their deaths. He finds a tenement in Brixton in a building resembling Carlton Mansions, having built this performance as his new home he reflects on it:

Had I expected the detour through understanding that I’d had to take in order to do anything for the last year – for my whole life – to be bypassed straight away: just cut off, a redundant nerve, an isolated oxbow lake that would evaporate?
No: that would take work – a lot of work (McCarthy 2015:136)

The protagonist is using the techniques of capitalism to construct himself a vast machine in order to provide him with momentary glimpses of un-alienated authenticity. However ultimately his re-enactment remains entirely mediated, by his staff, his workers, his machine. When he discovers that his pianist has been sneaking out of the house to go to rehearsals whilst leaving a tape loop repeating his piano practice the protagonist reacts furiously:

“It’s the same thing more or less. Isn’t it?”

[...] “No!” I shouted. “No it is not! It is just absolutely not the same thing!”

“Why not?” he asked His voice was still monotonous and flat but was shaking a little.

“Because... It absolutely isn’t! It’s just not the same because... It’s not the same at all”

(McCarthy 2015:141)

In this moment the protagonist is struggling to elucidate two major sources of pain, that the re-enactment’s success relies on for him, first that the performers should be committed and that he should trust the authenticity, the aura, of their contributions.

It isn’t enough for him just to experience but he needs to *know* that his commodity is authentic – and to find himself fooled is utterly shameful. This is the equivalent of discovering that a Franco Manca Pizza was taken from the freezer, and it never tasting the same again. Second, and more importantly, he cannot bear that he has not been able to pay his employees enough to overcome their alienation from the tasks they are completing for him – and in his rage he reveals himself as a brute capitalist, a true boss: “give him hell! Really bad! Hurt him! Metaphorically, I mean, I suppose” (McCarthy 2015:142). This resembles the embarrassment and anger that come from realising or suspecting that your waiter doesn’t care whether you enjoy your food or not, and they know what truly happens behind the scenes, a rage that can only be dealt with by some kind of reciprocal punishment or cruelty (e.g. not tipping), a comparison which will resonate firmly in chapter 7.

The re-enactments become progressively more spectacular, first a mundane incident at a tyre repair shop on Coldharbour Lane is left to loop indefinitely in a warehouse near Heathrow then a shooting outside the same tyre shop is re-enacted on location – and finally the protagonist decides to re-enact a bank heist. They construct a replica of a bank in west London and plan out the whole bank heist with the help of an ex bank robber, they plan every eventuality perfectly. But just before they are going to act out the robbery, in the fake bank inside a warehouse, the protagonist comes up with a brilliant idea – to transfer the re-enactment to the bank itself, to have real life customers and staff stand in for the actors who had been prepared for those roles, and not to tell them that they would be in a re-enactment. So with his unknowing re-enactors he undertook a heist, his master bureaucrat Naz had organised for all of the protagonist’s employees to be killed in an aircraft accident as they escaped to ‘safety’. In the process of the re-enactment, performance and facsimile transferred into reality, one of his re-enactors was shot and the scene quickly escalated. In the final scene Naz and the protagonist are in their private jet escaping when air traffic control instructs their pilot to turn round. At this point the protagonist hijacks the plane and orders them to keep flying out and turning back in an endless loop “turning back, then turning out. Then turning back again” (McCarthy 2015:275).

The protagonist in *Remainder* is struggling with alienation and authenticity. The plot of the novel provides a remarkably good analogue for the argument which I am attempting to make regarding these two entangled and messy concepts. Following his injury he begins to suspect that he has never been able to *be* authentically, his actions and his movements were always distanced from himself, he has pathologised his sense of alienation from society into a personal affliction, imagining that he alone suffers it. In order to experience a moment of authenticity he constructs a series of simulacra, each a highly organised performance of reality – heightened and tailored in order to allow him to transit through it smoothly, easily – like De Niro’s character in *Mean Streets*. But he realises that this kind of authenticity is only repetition and organisation and does not capture the actual reality of life. A mysterious local councillor who becomes his advisor/inquisitor late in the book, and who may be only a figment of his imagination summarises what he has been doing “[h]is ultimate goal, of course, being to – how shall we put it? To attain – no, to *accede to* – a kind of authenticity through this strange, pointless residual” (McCarthy 2015:231). This authenticity is an authenticity of the remainder, of the leftover, of fingerprints and signatures – of aura (Benjamin 1999). Following this conversation with the councillor he transfers his bank heist re-enactment into the real world and finally finds the peace he sought, in the chaos and bloodshed of a botched bank job. In its chaos and its messiness it is the perfect opportunity for the protagonist to feel that he simply *is* in the world, to be able to experience the fullness of reality, and for it to truly be real. This hardly seems like a happy ending; but the novel is a cautionary tale about trying to control reality, trying to hold back the fullness of the world through facsimile and organisation. In a rapidly changing neighbourhood this is what people seek to do on all sides, including academics, to make reality accede to a kind of authenticity – a pre-ordained semblance of something else, whether it is past or future. In this thesis I try to write and research in a way which captures the messiness of reality without attempting to make it kneel to a pre-ordained plan. In this way I hope to draw attention to the alienating effect that results from competing claims to authenticity made in response to the alienation that has arisen from a chaotically transforming neighbourhood. But most importantly this thesis is an attempt (albeit inevitably partial) to write about what I have experienced. The methodological, and epistemological, implications of these grand intentions will be considered in the next chapter.

3. A Messy Theory of Urban Change

3.1 Introduction

When a neighbourhood changes, and arguably all neighbourhoods are changing all of the time, there follows a turbulent wake whereby residents become distanced from the newer qualities of the place in which they live. The alienation which is a characteristic of our social conditions becomes exacerbated by this distancing. Claims to authenticity are tactics to negotiate the experience of alienation, and are an identifiable aspect of the transformation of urban neighbourhoods (e.g. Zukin 2009a,b). The contention of this thesis is that authenticity and alienation are part of the complex and messy process of neighbourhood change, and that neighbourhood change is produced by and produces multiple conflicting claims of authenticity and different and opposite experiences of alienation. This is not a simple matter of what was versus what is but a messy jostling between those claiming 'authentic' position in a place for different reasons. Gentrification literature has tended to represent processes of neighbourhood change as a cleanly structured and teleological process of change. This chapter will begin with a critique of gentrification scholarship on this basis, arguing that the term is better considered as a colloquial term than an analytical term due to the inevitable challenges of encompassing a complex set of urban phenomena within a single term of analysis. Gentrification looms large over the neighbourhood of Brixton, but the messy reality that will emerge in the empirical accounts made in this thesis cannot be encompassed by the term even at its most general.

The first section of this chapter will outline the limitations of gentrification but opt not to become unduly involved in a critique. Following from this I will outline some other approaches to difference in an urban setting, when a neighbourhood changes there is necessarily an encounter with difference. The account of urban change made in this project attempts to grapple with the complex intersections of identity which have been visible in Brixton as it has changed. Following a critique of gentrification scholarship I will outline discussions of race and multiculturalism, feminism and gender, and class (beyond that put forward in gentrification literature) in order to argue that a more complex and messy theory of neighbourhood change is required. In order to explore the complexity that is visible when the city is attended to at a granular scale this chapter will explore everyday spaces of consumption, markets and shopping streets. Overall the purpose of this thesis is to explore the messy and complex realities of urban change when witnessed at the scale of the neighbourhood. Central to the description of Brixton in this thesis is an account of conflicting claims to authenticity and encounters with difference and the mutual experiences of alienation that emerge from this tumult. Gentrification literature has not provided an adequate frame for such an account, and I argue that in order to appreciate the everyday reality of a rapidly changing neighbourhood an appreciation of the immense complexity of these dynamics is required. I will

conclude by suggesting that this raises both methodological and epistemological questions which will be considered in chapter 4.

3.2 Gentrification from phenomena to theory

Most commonly the credit for the term gentrification is given to Ruth Glass' 1964 introduction to *London Aspects of Change*. Ruth Glass' significance to this thesis is greater than the term which she used only once in print. In the following chapter I will suggest that Ruth Glass' approach to the city was distinct from that put forward in the academic field of gentrification studies as it emerged in the 1970s. Perhaps if those who write about gentrification had spent more time with Ruth Glass' work they would have advanced a different set of ideas. Instead I will take Chris Hamnett (1973) as the progenitor of the genealogy of gentrification as it currently persists in urban studies, Tom Slater (2009:295) has suggested that Hamnett was the first after Ruth Glass to use the term in an academic paper – though notably Glass (1964) is not cited. When Dugmore and Williams respond to Hamnett's article they remain taxonomically ambiguous "Gentrification, Chelseafication or whatever term is employed" (1974:159). At this stage in the development of the term Hamnett and Williams, who eventually publish together (1980) are carrying out very geographically bounded research; they initially draw little on theory (Hamnett 1973, Williams 1976) and appear to show interest in the very specific conditions of their case studies.

Neil Smith (1979) put forward the rent gap hypothesis and made an intervention that lead to gentrification being considered a generalizable principle rather than a specifically observed phenomenon. Smith himself wrote "[w]ith the enthusiasm of a second year graduate student I thought to theorize what I was looking at" (Smith 1992:110). Following Neil Smith gentrification became a phenomenon which was anticipated before it was observed. From this point the discussion about gentrification that was hosted in journals became dominated with debates as to the proper definition of this newly abstracted theory (Smith 1987, Ley 1987, Hamnett 1991, 1992, Smith 1992, Slater 2009, 2010, Hamnett 2009). There is no need to rehearse these petulant exchanges except to note that all of these academics carried out their research in different cities. Perhaps the debate was a simple consequence of the fact that gentrification is not the replicable phenomena that these men wanted it to be.

3.3 Other voices

During the 1980s Damaris Rose and Robert Beauregard were the most prominent dissenters (Beauregard 1985; 1990; Rose 1984). Both were of the opinion that gentrification and gentrifiers are

'chaotic conceptions' which obscure the fact that a multiplicity of processes rather than a single causal process produces changes in the occupation of inner city neighbourhoods from lower to higher income residents. (Rose 1984:61).

In reflecting on gentrification literature's failure to accommodate this complexity Rose stated that it was a methodological and epistemological issue that required alternatives to positivism (1984:49). She sought a stark methodological shift for gentrification studies which I would argue has not emerged, or not sufficiently so.

A substantial change to the methodologies associated with gentrification studies requires a different orientation towards the term. Gentrification must not be a frame of analysis – instead it should be defined by its use on the ground. For instance, when at his most militant, and eloquent, Smith is talking about the view on the ground, the unforgettable image of a “revanchist urbanism [...] a desperate defense of a challenged phalanx of privileges, cloaked in the populist language of civic morality, family values and neighbourhood security” (Smith 2012:211). But for too long, the term has been composed, and imposed, from above. Perhaps rather than fretting about what gentrification means, or is caused by, there should be a renewed focus on what it feels like. Because, as much as at this stage it would be better to jettison the term, it does not just live in the pages of journals, but as graffiti on the walls of neighbourhoods.

I contend that to adequately engage with gentrification, it should be seen as an everyday phenomenon and a colloquial term, this requires a highly critical engagement with the literature. Liz Bondi (1991) is one of few that has done this with any success – however whilst her article ‘Gender Divisions and Gentrification: A Critique’ is widely cited, it is read more as a treatise on gender alone (e.g. Hamnett 2003:2402), and not as a more broadly relevant critique of the term. Her focus is on questions of Gender, but the implications are broader, Smith “prioritizes abstract economic processes over the cultural conditions of their operation” (Bondi 1991:194), and emphasis on class fails to recognise that Gender (like race) “is inextricably bound up with class constitution” (1991:193). Not only is the economic/cultural divide a great problem, but it contributes to the inability to account for the complex conflictual experience of gentrification. Furthermore, Bondi proposes a methodological solution, local case studies that focus on how “class, gender, 'racial' and ethnic positions are expressed and forged through gentrification” (1991:196). Recalling Rose's (1984) stance against positivism alongside this makes it seem surprising that ethnographic approaches to gentrification are so thin on the ground.

Attempts have been made to engage with some of the problems set out above, but at best they have been palliative. It has been pointed out before, that there is a great deal of writing about gentrification that focuses on speaking to gentrifiers and researching their lives (Slater, Curran, and Lees 2004, Slater 2006). Chief amongst those carrying out this research have been Butler and Robson (2001, 2003a, 2003b) - with case studies including Brixton. Referencing Pierre Bourdieu they suggest that social capital wielded by the gentrifying classes contributes to the manner in which they exert influence in a neighbourhood. They are following Hamnett's previous call for research that looks at the production of gentrifiers, and doing so convincingly. However as Slater, Curran and Lees have suggested, there is a real need to speak to the people affected by gentrification:

Imagine the richness of gentrification research if we had the same volume of research into the dilemmas facing low-income tenants as we have on the experiences and desires of middle-class movers and shakers! (2004:1142).

However, this requires a substantial change in methodology, and in the deployment of the term gentrification. One cannot simply go into the field seeking validation. One must be willing to make one's hypotheses vulnerable to lived experience. In Kirsteen Paton's recent work she has stated this point very clearly:

I reassert the importance of place-based studies of class for analysing the complexities of structure and agency, revealing that processes of individualisation and disassociation have a material basis, which is linked to restructuring. (2014:9)

I agree with Paton, and contend that the continued generation of ethnographic work in neighbourhoods investigating the process of change is essential (see also Modan 2008).

The challenge of retaining the analytical cogency of the term in the face of empirical challenges to its universality continue to occupy some in the field. Most recently Lees, Hyun Shin, and Lopez Morales have made efforts to assert the planetary relevance of the term (2016). Whilst at a larger scale it may be valuable for identifying urban structural tendencies – when observed at a local level, as I have done in Brixton, the messiness of a changing neighbourhood defies easy classification. Gentrification literature has tended to neglect the complex intersection of identities that constitute a ‘neighbourhood’. Yet deeply embedded in processes of neighbourhood change are multiple and contested claims to authentic identities, claims made by the middle classes, claims made by existing residents, and claims made by local institutions and businesses. This is because those contesting the shape of a neighbourhood must first constitute that neighbourhood socially, spatially and culturally, the kind of dream-image that Butler and Robson, writing about Brixton, have called: “Brixton of the mind” (2003b:1804). I will try to argue that when attended to at street level a ‘neighbourhood’ is messy, and more often than not any notion of discrete ‘community’ must be “constructed and projected” (Back 1996:20) onto it in retrospect. The following section of chapter will look at some of the structures of identity that play a role in urban neighbourhoods such as Brixton. It is in response to chaos and complexity that it becomes necessary to claim authenticity, to give a value to the claims one makes about their position in the messy local community.

3.4 Making and remaking difference in the everyday

In this section I will attempt to explore the limitations highlighted so far in social science approaches to neighbourhood change and difference in the city, as well as the shortcomings of some everyday approaches. I will do this with reference to both theoretical and empirical accounts of multi-culture. I will highlight the

importance of oppositional, political thinking with regard to issues of social difference. I will make this case through a reading of critical work on race, class, and gender - with a focus on work adjacent to my field geographically, thematically or methodologically. Attention to everyday social difference should not mean the denial of agency to the actors involved. The everyday is a realm of tactics (de Certeau 2011). However the actions that are taken by people at this level are at times considered as passive and subject to structural factors. I will argue that in navigating everyday configurations of social difference people actively produce their identities and, importantly, are not universally unaware of the structural implications of their actions. I will argue this with reference to theory and research relating to social difference, in some cases even as researchers acknowledge the political agency of the people they work with, they can undercut this in their analysis.

de Certeau distinguishes between tactics and strategy (2011: xix). Strategy is a tool of abstract power operated from without and tactics are the operations of evasion, negotiation, and subversion from within the bounds of structures of power. de Certeau valuably shows how this dynamic also operates within the academy - in the distinction between “models that [...] reign from top to bottom” and the “art of practice” (2011:24). The observation of tactics requires a participatory form of research, and cannot be done at a level of remove. However, the tactic in de Certeau’s model, seems to be unable to truly move against the strategic. In this section I will contrast Ash Amin and Paul Gilroy’s work on the notion of multiculturalism with reference to this distinction between tactics and strategy. I will try to argue for a notion of the tactical that following Gilroy also emphasises the oppositional and critical. There is a risk that a distinction between tactics and strategy could become bogged down in discussion of structure and agency. However in considering Marx in chapter 1 the notion of alienation emerged as a way in which agency and structure can be seen to be in a messy relationship within the life and body of the individual. The notion of the tactical or everyday scale which I develop in this section is therefore not intended to provide an alternative to a structural model of society but instead to provide a radically different perspective on it.

3.5 Multi-culture and race

In *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (2002 [1987]) Gilroy makes a comparison between the radical grass roots agitation carried out by Rock Against Racism (RAR) in the 1970s and the institutional strategies deployed by the Greater London Council (GLC) in the 1980s. Whilst racism should be seen at an “everyday” (Wise and Velayutham 2009) level, it should also be seen as a profoundly political issue which is entangled with the messiness of social difference manifest at street level. Making his comparison between RAR and the GLC Gilroy writes:

Rather than tie the anti-racist project to a distinct and recognisable range of themes and political priorities as RAR had done (nationalism, fascism, policing, racial violence) this municipal anti-racism allows the concept of racism to ascend to rarified heights where, like a lost balloon, it becomes impossible to retrieve. (2002:189)

Gilroy's argument here is similar to that made above, that gentrification has been removed from the streets and lost in an academic debate. One of the tasks of this thesis is to ensure that terms of analysis are not left floating above empirical research connected by fine geometrical strings, but kicked around in the grub and mess of the everyday.

When Gilroy asserts that racism is not a matter of 'race' but conversely "the workings of racism [...] produce the order of racial truths and not the other way around" (2004:116). He points to the role of practice in the construction and combatting of racism. This emphasis on practice rather than the rarified conception of 'race' is central to Gilroy's notion of conviviality, this "ordinary, demotic multiculturalism" is the consequence of "vernacular dissidence" and "concrete oppositional work" and not "governmental drift and institutional indifference" (2004:108). As I continue to develop my position I will emphasise the importance of the oppositional and the dissident as elements of the way that racism, and other elements of social difference, are negotiated on the ground. When cited in social science work on everyday forms of multiculturalism, the political (with a defiantly small p) side of conviviality is often neglected.

Ash Amin's, primarily theoretical, 2012 book *Land of Strangers* sets out to answer a broad question about what kind of society can best accommodate social difference. It starts with the interesting premise that too much emphasis is laid on "strong social ties" (2012:6) and that this communal ideal "recommends the exclusion or domestication of the stranger" (2012:3). He centres his proposal for a "politics of respectful distance" on the twin principles of "multiplicity" that all claims to identity are rendered equal, and "commons" (2012:7), the provision of space and infrastructures that allow for a public sphere to accommodate this multiplicity. This is a very clean and tidy image of society where liberal principles trump all conflict. Amin seems to imply that alienation is a necessary part of human life, and that communal ideas of society rely on exclusion of the other. This assumes that "strong social ties" (2012:6) must rest on shared 'authentic' identity, an alienated authenticity which states that a group share a common relationship to an external referent and must necessarily be harshly bounded. Perhaps the kind of authentic politics, as advocated by Berman (1971) could inform a notion of society where "respectful distance" (Amin 2012:7) can be surpassed by solidarity and empathy.

Amin's explanation of why race persists rests on a human "biological instinct" (2012: 93) to categorise other individuals. This unnerving position veers towards ethnic absolutism of the psyche rather than the body. When he published a chapter from this book as a journal article (2010) it received a rigorous critique (Venn 2011; Simone 2011; Rattansi 2011; Silva 2011). Amin suggests that racism can be countered by a rejuvenation of the commons. Amin's proposal simultaneously adopts the rarified abstract thinking of strategy whilst also advocating a solution, which seems like a tactical work around rather than a direct confrontation of structural inequality. Whilst his notion of "breathable space [...] ready for the convivial or disjunctive combinations of

everyday encounter” (Amin 2012:81) shows an appreciation of the role of an everyday level of interaction in kindling forms of conviviality that exceed divisions of social difference, his comprehension of what might constitute these spaces in reality seems limited. For Amin these breathable, truly public spaces require a re-establishment of the commons. He suggests this can be claimed now, “without waiting for a time of clearance when the commons can be freed from capital” (2012:80). Amin hopes that through a reformist policy agenda the perceived “threat to prosperity” (2012:125) from the other can be overcome, and in the commons, provided that people accede to “terms and conditions of sharing” (2012:132) everyone can get along. In this thesis alienation refers to a condition of everyday experience that is observable in both the workings of a street market and of the financial market, in line with Marx’s (2000) depiction of alienation of both a structural condition of labour and a psychological condition of the everyday. I cannot agree with Amin that there is such a thing as the commons without the commons being freed from capital.

Whilst Amin sees that racism is overcome at an everyday level, this reform can be orchestrated from above, policy by policy it is possible to overcome the barriers to a good society. Venn’s response is particularly relevant. She calls race “a relational praxis embedded in and arising from a chaotic everyday” (2011:105). This chaos and messiness is not just absent from Amin’s understanding of race, but his account of society as a whole. He neglects social class, gender, sexuality, age or any other of the manifold dimensions that are at work muddying up the tidy if depressing social truce that he imagines. Ruth Glass made this messiness clear in *Newcomers* (1960), in her concluding remarks, titled ‘Uncertainty’, she wrote that “[the] arithmetic of prejudice in this country is a highly complex matter so complex that it tends to be oversimplified and added up wrongly in the process” (1960: 212). I would suggest that Amin’s argument in *Land of Strangers* (2012) fails in exactly this way, by imagining that race is explainable. In fact it is in the inexplicability of race that we might find the most hope.

Amanda Wise responded to Ash Amin as part of a special issue of *Identities* (2013). Whilst she is relatively hopeful about the value of his argument she focuses on the question of practice (2013:40). She suggests that Amin does not recognise the importance of everyday encounter in challenging racism. The key question arising from *Land of Strangers* (2012) for Wise regards “the material and political qualities of the urban commons” (2013:44), albeit fleetingly, she also makes clear that class is a factor that Amin seems to neglect (2013:45). Her notion of ‘everyday multiculturalism’ developed with Siveraj Velayutham in their 2009 book is an approach much closer to the tactics and practice of the everyday than Amin. However I will suggest that attending to the everyday must not be done at the expense of recognising negotiations of difference at this scale as being at times oppositional and profoundly political. In a theoretical introduction to the edited collection *Everyday Multiculturalism* (2009) Wise and Velayutham lay out what they mean by the title of the book. They contrast it specifically with multiculturalism as a set of “top-down [...] policies” (2009:2). Instead everyday multiculturalism means a focus on “how cultural diversity is experienced and negotiated on the ground in

everyday situations” (2009:2). There is a risk, as I tried to suggest previously regarding de Certeau’s notion of tactics (2011) that attending to difference on this scale, and focussing on the mundane does not expose the workings of structures of power on the ground.

Whilst undoubtedly there is an important role for “drift” (Hall 1999, also Watson and Saha 2013:2017) in the development of multiculturalism, this should not be understood as an inevitable consequence of proximity. The factors that sharpen and complicate social difference are vast, complex and deeply embedded in culture. Whilst Wise and Velayutham state that “the everyday multiculturalism perspective does not exclude wider social cultural and political processes” when they characterise the relationship between these structural factors and the everyday as a matter of “filter through” (2009:3) they de-politicise the everyday actions that constitute a struggle against these broader factors. The everyday encounter with difference remains fraught and antagonistic, the confrontations that happen in public space today as they did in 1960 are clearly not being overcome by dint of proximity, filtering through, or trickling down.

The notion of struggle and radicalism with regards to anti-racism as presented by Gilroy (2002), and the notion that the power of the struggle has been lost as the movement was municipalized feels particularly relevant in the present day given the renewed presence on the streets of radical black activism, notably in the form of the *Black Lives Matter* movement, one of whose marches I was able to join in Brixton in 2015. Abdoumalik Simone has described the American Black Power movement as “more than anything else, a concerted, coordinated effort to provide care” (2016:192). Naturally Simone sees that Black Power had a significant effect on the formal structures of legislature and society, but significantly he is saying that “Black Power was aimed at inventing a collective subject” (2016:193), a project then of countering the alienation that has been inflicted on black people because of their race. There were moments in Brixton that I met white people who felt threatened by notions of Black Power, as they did not recognize themselves as racist (see section 5.9) – the movement as seen through the media seemed militant and violent. This type of prejudice and fear surrounding the *Black Lives Matter* movement today is similar to that which appears to have led to what Gilroy calls the municipalisation of anti-racism in the 1970s (2002). Academics should also not shy away from these movements, they are projects to create un-alienated authentic politics, and notions of polite anti-racism, or undue faith in the possibility of state led policy reform as discussed by Amin neglect to identify that a movement like *Black Lives Matter* might be seen as an attempt to seize the means of producing subjecthood. Simone’s description of Black Power (2016) casts it as a project of radical closeness - in stark contrast to Amin’s polite distance. The caring space of the soup kitchen (chapter 8) and the importance of ordinary interactions in this thesis are not focussed on out of disregard for the structural inequalities that discriminate on the basis of race, gender, class or other identity; but because of the contention that it is in such spaces, and through such interactions that such inequalities may be countered.

3.6 The practice of everyday difference

In this section I will argue that social difference is negotiated everyday not just through the mundane but through the extraordinary, the oppositional and the political. The complex and messy relations that occur between people in everyday life in the city is one place where social identity is constructed. It is not only that to observe the everyday allows a researcher to make an accurate representation of human life, but that they are able to witness a space where attempts to produce subjects and communities are made, come in to conflict, are obstructed, or succeed – consequently the everyday is a space of political contestation, and as with Simone's observations of the Black Power movement, to ignore the everyday interactions that happen between people can be to ignore part of people's political lives. Sociologist Les Back has detailed the complex and intricate negotiation of identity among young people in South London. Through play, through "winding up" and "cussing" (1996:73) there is a constant interplay. Most valuable in Back's incredibly close-up ethnographic material is his ability to reveal these kind of actions as being politically self-aware, he emphasises that "young black people are not passive recipients of racist discourses" (1996:161). Not only this, but these negotiations are not made across a singular divide of race, but across complex dividing lines that, even between the two estates that his research took place in, can operate very differently. Rattansi has shown that similar "labrynthine cultural differentiations" (2000:129) are at play in Asian 'racial' identity. When observed close up it becomes very difficult to separate notions of 'race' from other negotiations of social difference.

Furthermore, Back shows very clearly that racism, at least in the two council estates where his research was based, is constantly intersected by class, gender, and notions of community (1996:107). Both sites, though in markedly different ways, construct racialised discourses around 'community' and the ways that they their communities have changed over time. Back suggests that not only does this discourse of community often become the basis for a racism (1996:46) but also that there are a number of competing discourses that claim to speak for the community (1996:47). His work argues that social difference is constantly challenged and configured in everyday interactions, and is also dominated and controlled not just by lofty structural interventions, but by local discourses of community. Back depicts a messy and contested realm of social difference in his research. Furthermore, these daily interactions that at times resemble Gilroy's "vernacular dissidence" (2002:108) can reveal political clout in that they play a role in forging new social configurations.

This conflict over what the 'community' should be like is evident again in sociologist Claire Alexander's (2011) article about Brick Lane in East London, and the project to label it 'Banglatown'. The residents of the area clearly identified it as a Bangladeshi neighbourhood, an identity forged out of the struggle against racism during the 1970s (2011:210). However this desire to claim the space from the inside as being culturally Bangladeshi, appears to have turned into an external branding project to bring in tourists and businesses that many of

Alexander's respondents felt uncomfortable with (2011:214). The formation of local identity, and the negotiation of social difference in an area should be considered full of agency and intent, Alexander criticises the Banglatown project on this basis. There are emotional, personal, lived, embodied, narrative practices through which the identity of an area is actively formed - the neglect of this account "thins" (2011:218) the account made of a neighbourhood. Such narratives may be subject to strategies of domination, however, they are often resisting them directly and not just tactically negotiating them.

This active construction of identity through everyday life in one's neighbourhood is of course not limited to race. In *Distinction* (2010 [1984]) Bourdieu's model of financial, social and symbolic capital suggested a way in which the active performance of identity as taste could be linked to social status. Bourdieu's work continues to play a central role in the work of geographers and sociologists on class. Robyn Dowling (2009) has heralded the return of class to human geography following an apparent ten year absence. In geographical literature on gentrification class has never really disappeared, however the focus has, as already discussed in section 2 above, often been limited to the middle classes. Butler and Robson (2003a,b) and Butler and Hamnett (2011) have argued convincingly that the cultural capital and financial clout of the middle classes gives them the ability not only to work to actively construct their class identity (these papers focus on education and schooling), but also to form the neighbourhood in their own image. Butler and Robson suggested that the middle classes in Brixton are actively reacting to mixedness and perceived "roughness" (Watt 2006) and dialectically producing a position for themselves in the neighbourhood (Butler and Robson 2003a:1803). This points to the need for an account of capital and power relations in any kind of description of social difference in a neighbourhood, as those who have the ability to intervene in institutions such as education, and other local campaigning groups can take a position not equally accessible to all in the community. However it is a serious limitation that Robson, Butler and Hamnett's research into education, carried out across London over a number of years, is entirely focused on the middle classes.

Sociologist Bev Skeggs' book *Formations of Class and Gender* (1997) is the result of a deep piece of fieldwork carried out over ten years with a group of working class women in the North of England who participated in 'caring courses'. She suggests that they consistently 'disidentify' with working class identity (1997:74-98). She writes that whilst these women knew "their 'place' [...] they were always trying to leave it" (1997:81). As they get older, she discusses some of the women's relationship with middle class identity, suggesting that in actively trying to disassociate themselves from working class identity and to be perceived as 'respectable' they adopt middle class signifiers things like, as one respondent puts it, "elegant" (1997:84) clothes, what Skeggs calls "passing" (1997:82). Skeggs contrasts this valuably with middle class attempts to "play" (1997:91) at working class identity through signifiers like scruffy clothing. Appearance is only one signifier however, and those in a position to judge this working class play - the working class - do not have the social power needed for their

critique to have impact. Skeggs' analysis reveals that these women are very actively and consciously engaging with class identity and negotiating their position within it. However Skeggs' adherence to a structural model of class, in that she seems to suggest that there is something 'real' that these women are avoiding or failing to participate in, denies political agency to her respondents. It is clear elsewhere in the book that this is not something she wishes to do (1997:167-8), however, I would suggest that the actions of these women should be seen as not merely tactically negotiating class, but actively producing social identity that is as 'real' as any other.

Attempts to reveal the full complexity and messiness of social difference inevitably subvert traditional modes of analysis. Work like that of Skeggs, which is based on strong relationships draws out the oft silenced political agency of those who lack a voice in mainstream social discourse. However a positivist analysis, whereby data is judged by its adequate correlation with an idea such as 'working class' or 'femininity' remains problematic. Skeggs' demonstration of the intersections between class and gender is fascinating; she suggests that femininity is a fundamentally middle class identity (1997:105), and one that working class women "do" (1997:104) or "perform" (1997:116) but never own. Evident in Skeggs' account is that these women neither identify with, nor can abandon the performance of a middle class femininity. Skeggs writes that there were "few culturally valid and economically possible or potential alternatives available for enacting at a local level" (1997:116), rather than being engaged in actively constructing their own distinct identity. I would suggest that however well their identity resembles any ideal form, it should be seen as an active attempt to produce a social subject in society.

Accounts of social difference that are not analysed through the lens of structural (or strategic) idealism may reveal the practice of everyday life (de Certeau 2011) as constituting a profoundly political resistance to rarified forms of identity. The significant point to make here is that the things that happen at this everyday scale are political acts, they are active attempts to engage with society and to form an identity which can operate within it. The question of whether this is accommodated, or whether these identities are empowered by the recognition that they are participating in the formation of society is another one altogether. The examples in this section pursue the conviction that society and politics are being imagined and contested in the negotiation of difference and identity in the everyday. Chapter 8 of this thesis will strongly argue that this is the case, and that urban studies can benefit from an attention to the city at a small scale.

3.7 Messiness in public – markets and encounter

The previous section argued that an attention to the messiness of difference in the everyday can reveal an incisive perspective on the social condition and politics of urban space. Few spaces are as iconic of encounter as shopping streets and markets. Perhaps the reason that Brixton Village market, and adjacent shopping streets

and covered markets in Brixton, have become so iconic in the debate about ‘gentrification’ in the area is that markets are exemplary spaces of social messiness, or “rubbing along” (Watson 2009). Shopping markets, as dense spaces of consumption and congregation are places of heightened proximity, through bodies and through speech. In academic literature markets and similar dense spaces of consumption, are often read as spaces in which social difference is contested, constructed and produced. Such spaces are becoming central to current debates regarding neighbourhood change (Gonzalez and Walley 2013) and as such they require consideration in their full complexity. Following a brief review of this literature I will argue that whilst many scholars rightly identify such spaces as having a certain messiness, both methodologically and analytically there is further to go.

In their incisive article geographers Sara Gonzalez and Paul Walley (2013) have drawn attention to traditional markets as both invaluable and embattled sites at the heart of cities, particularly in Britain. Yet their image of the market as a white working class domain disguises the complexity at the heart of such dense public spaces. Sociologists Sophie Watson and Karen Wells highlight this tendency in their account of nostalgia in the pseudonymous Poppy Street Market (2005). The construction of a nostalgic narrative “masks and writes over” (Watson and Wells 2005:23) historical social discord in turn heightening the tensions between those with a longer history with the site and incomers, in this case those housed at a relatively new centre for asylum seekers. Nostalgic invocations of a past dream of social smoothness play a role in the “politics of resentment” (Wells and Watson 2005:261) from which follows a racialized narrative of decline. Whilst my research responds to Gonzalez and Walley’s (2013) rallying cry, I do so with the aim of drawing out the messiness of such spaces.

Following on from the discussion in section 3.6 it is notable that markets have had a particular relevance to those with an interest in issues of difference and identity in the city, Hiebert, Rath and Vertovec (2015) have argued this very clearly. They propose that markets (they are speaking about street markets in particular but acknowledge broader applicability) are an as yet under researched site for the exploration of what they call the “Society/economy nexus” (2015:18). Furthermore they assert that markets are shaped by, and in turn shape, diversity (2015:16). Their paper is a call for further research and their suggestion that adequate accounts of markets must deploy a mixed and pragmatic approach to methods (2015:14) will be reflected in the following chapter. Their paper argues that markets are spaces where a researcher can find “wider meaning in the mundane” (2015:18) whose study bleeds into multiple other areas of society, being as they are “places of intersection” (2015:15). With their argument in mind I would like to suggest that by making the covered markets the core of my research proposal, and by acknowledging the complexity of such spaces, I hope to open up the changing neighbourhood in a different way to that which has typically been achieved in the forms of research into neighbourhood change detailed in the previous section.

Markets are a site of the fraught contestation of social difference. The harsh and painful reality of racism appears to surface regularly in these spaces of consumption and congregation. A tendency made painfully evident by Wells and Watson in their article *A Politics of Resentment: Shopkeepers in a London Neighbourhood* (2005) where shopkeepers express their negative feelings towards the asylum seekers being temporarily housed in the neighbourhood. Geographer Rachel Slocum has highlighted a ‘whitening’ effect in alternative food markets in the U.S, an important issue, though her conclusion that “There is no utility to advocacy that dismisses whiteness and what it brings” (2007:532) is too forgiving. Particularly if the potential for markets to be spaces of multi-culture is to be realised, the proliferation of whiteness, even as racism by omission - must be criticised as racist.

Watson identifies this potential clearly when she talks about “rubbing along” (2009:581) in the context of street markets, a term she uses to describe an everyday encounter with difference. The potential for an “Everyday Multiculturalism” (Wise 2010; Wise and Velayutham 2009) is developed by sociologist Amanda Wise in her work in a suburban Melbourne shopping street (2010). At the heart of her account is the emotional intensity in the interactions between Chinese newcomers and incumbent European minorities in the area (2010:920-22). Her research reveals the mess, contradiction and complexity of negotiating social difference in public. This emerges, she suggests, when a researcher is able to “really localise and get into the ethnographic depths of racism” (2010:920). Wise’s research reveals the intersections of multiple structures of difference - and their effect, beyond the discursive, on the body (2010:932). At a discursive level the transformation of a public space (cf. Slocum 2007) may not be outwardly antagonistic, understanding the spatial and bodily impact of neighbourhood change may reveal a more egregious reaction.

Alex Rhys Taylor emphasises a multi-sensory approach, his article on a seafood stall describes the “gut reaction” (2013b:244) of disgust that is more an unconscious squirm at social difference than it is a response to real dirt. He links this to Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (2010) regarding consumption choices and the marking out of class boundaries. Food as a visceral encounter with difference is a recurring trope (cf. Highmore 2008). Amanda Wise quotes an interviewee saying “their cooking is different so people don’t like necessarily, the aromas all the time” (2010:929), or a similar quote in Wells and Watson on the food of Muslim migrants “[it] stinks, it’s dirty” (2005:269). Paying attention to the specific embodied experience of spaces such as markets illuminates the actual practice of making society. However Rhys-Taylor over-emphasises the significance of the inter-mingling of smells and sensory experience writing, “[t]he everyday multi-culture that emerges through the senses has outpaced both cultural theory and many city dwellers’ own accounts of their lives” (2013a:405). The notion that the proximity of different sensory stimuli has an effect is reasonable, however the idea that it might outpace the conscious representation of the politics of difference by city dwellers strongly denies agency to those participating in the production of such sensory stimulus. Furthermore Rhys-Taylor avoids engaging with questions of co-option, whilst he acknowledges bell hooks’ critique of “eating the other” (Rhys Taylor

2013a:404 citing hooks 1992:21, see also May 1996) he underplays its impact on his research. The meaning of sensory experience without a detailed engagement with the production of those sensory stimuli is insufficient for understanding the way such sensory stimuli interact with social difference.

Each of the researchers discussed identify to some degree the complex and layered nature of social difference in the public spaces where they work. Sophie Watson's (2009) article 'The Magic of the Marketplace' makes the clearest move to take a view of the market that encompasses multiple negotiations of difference. She develops the idea of "rubbing along" (2009:1581) a kind of fluid sociality which encompasses encounters across multiple structural divides, class, race, gender - but also age, disability, isolation. The main thrust of her argument is that markets can be spaces that "dissolve some of the predictable boundaries and divisions and open up new possibilities for sociality and engagement in everyday public space" (2009:1590) and that they should be nurtured as such. I hope to develop this position by asking questions about the way that ideal concepts of 'community' are performed in these spaces, how in their fluidity they become a focus for conflict over how public space should be constructed, and how social complexity becomes the backdrop for this.

Markets are a place in which difference is contested - where the messiness that underpins urban space boils over. As such they are both dangerous and potent, spaces in which society dreams itself into existence. The market in Brixton in chapters 6 and 7 appears as both a utopia and a dystopia. There is a deep contradiction in the space of the market. It both provides an image of society jostling together, coming into conflict, and producing itself anew, and an image of sheer commerce. This tension is at the heart of chapter 6 where the market is both iconic of gentrification and also the community that has been lost. The geographer Jon Goss writing about waterfront tourist markets has said that the "liminal encounter with the other on the waterfront depends on the exclusion of social difference" (1996:240). It is true that such spaces, as they become 'redeveloped' and the extraction of capital becomes more highly organised, lose something of their vivacity, however the mess and the complexity of everyday life can never be totally quashed and "over the long haul" (Simone 2016:15) a researcher can draw attention to the this complexity. To reveal the messiness of a space like a market is to challenge a commoditisation of diversity, that celebrates difference as it obscures it (Haylett 2001; 2003). On one hand Brixton village market has become a hollowed out container for the commodity form, on the other when strict attention is paid to its mundanities the radical utopias that Benjamin could see in the arcades (1999b) might be glimpsed in Brixton. In chapter 4, drawing upon intersectional theory and notions of complexity, I will argue that this requires an epistemological shift, and a methodological response.

I have tried to demonstrate that existing works on markets and other dense spaces of consumption and congregation show that when seen up close they reveal the messiness and complexity of a neighbourhood. Simone, writing about Tambora market in Jakarta has described the complex mundanities through which life

is produced around the market, but he warns the researcher “whatever form the street market generates must be grasped over the long haul” (2016:15). In this section I have discussed some of the ways in which social difference attended to at the scale of the everyday can be seen to illuminate the social conditions at large. Following the critique of gentrification in the previous part of the chapter I have attempted to position my approach to social difference and social change as one that starts with the scale of the everyday. At this scale I have suggested that social conditions are complex and messy and that identity cannot be reduced to solid classifications. That at this scale we can observe the production of social life not simply the reflection of structure. As Hiebert et al (2015) argue, the study of markets promises to be both illuminating and methodologically challenging.

3.8 Conclusion: alienation as a product of neighbourhood change

This chapter began with a critique of the field of academic scholarship that might most obviously be interested in the recent history of Brixton (3.2, 3.3). I argued that Gentrification is a term which cannot accommodate the full complexity of change that occurs in a neighbourhood like Brixton as it is transformed. The battling over the definition of the term is a clear indication of the term’s inability to accommodate a diverse and chaotic set of urban processes. Instead the chapter discusses other academic efforts to account for difference and change at an everyday scale (3.4). In particular debates over multiculturalism and race (3.5) inform a discussion about the importance of messiness and conflict in the negotiation of difference and the emergence of a more equal society. This develops into the contention that it is in the everyday that we can observe the production of the city, and that such everyday tactics are not simply a diverting representation of the quotidian but an approach which can illuminate structures of inequality from below (3.6). Finally, through the case study of markets and shopping streets I attempt to show the relationship between specific urban spaces and such messy everyday politics, and to argue that the two appear to produce one another. Ultimately this chapter positions this thesis at an intersection between structural and everyday approaches to the city and sets up the epistemological and methodological challenges that will be addressed in chapter 4.

When an attempt is made to regenerate the chaos of the city into a more ordered and regular form there is always a loss. Displacement, the pain and sadness experienced by those who live in a neighbourhood which is being redefined in a way which excludes them are such losses. Ruth Glass understood that messiness was at the heart of the city (Glass 1964:xiii) and I will discuss this further in the next chapter. When the city is treated as a totality there is a loss, this applies as much to the academic representation of the city as it does to the actual organisation and production of it. Under contemporary social conditions to change a city is to make it operate ‘better’ under these conditions, and inevitably this leaves some marked as abject and alien. In Duneier’s *Sidewalk*

he describes just this process as some of those he met selling books on the street in Greenwich Village describe a history of being shaken out of Penn Station which had become a site that had accommodated the homeless and drug dependent during the 1980s (1999:124). In the early 1990s a concerted effort to ‘clean up’ the neighboured resulted in Penn station becoming “inhospitable” (Duneier 1999:128) to the people that had made a home there. The people that live in a city are forced through it requiring constant adjustment and movement, only property owners are entitled to a permanent home and even then spectres such as negative equity may rise to force them to move again.

However the pressures that produce and are produced by neighbourhood change cannot be reduced to economic factors. In Brixton in the 1950s and 60s as a new generation of Caribbean immigrants arrived, as will be discussed further in chapter 5, the rents in the area were not cheap. Caribbean tenants were widely exploited by landlords paying inflated prices versus their white neighbours (Hinds 1980:50). Brixton’s role in London’s black community was a consequence of complex factors not a simple rational economic pull. As discussed above Gilroy emphasises the messy and contested nature of the political struggle around race and racism in London, emphasising the role of “vernacular dissidence” (2002:108). With the street market and the high street as an example the previous section has shown how such messy contestation produces socially valuable spaces through processes such as that described by Sophie Watson as “rubbing along” (2009:1581). Here social change appears as a tactic, whereas too often it is implemented as a strategy, and too often academics have maintained the epistemology of capital even as they have critiqued its products.

Returning to the discussion in chapter 2, of authenticity and alienation, to imagine that there is a singular and comprehensible city is to assume a position of alienation, a cold observer who can extricate themselves from the messiness of human life in order to describe it from afar, as the observer at the top of the World Trade Centre at the beginning of de Certeau’s chapter on walking (1998: 91-111). To make a home sellable it is necessary to imagine the people on a given street as interchangeable with any other. From an alienated perspective it is easier to construct the equivalences that allow the commoditisation of urban space. In this way the neighbourhood produced by its residents is sold on as an ‘authentic’ commodity alienated from those that made it, and those that arrive must find their own ‘authentic’ place to attach themselves. The practice of life and the complex maelstrom of change that has produced neighbourhoods such as Brixton (see chapter 5) is in part the product of un-mediated encounters, the product of rubbing along and vernacular dissidence. But this product is never consumed by those that labour over it, the city as commodity is taken from its producers and awarded to others. The complex, messy, oppositional practice which has been described in this chapter should not only be described in detail but linked to the processes of urban change which produce further inequality and displacement. Gentrification scholarship has tended to focus on neighbourhood change as a structural process, in this chapter I have tried to argue that this neglects a more complex and messy register at which such

processes can be observed. An ethnographic approach offers a thick description of the messier tangled means of production which necessarily precede gentrification.

I do not suggest that a critique of structuralism or positivism requires a negation of the importance of structure in urban studies. I made this point in this chapter with reference to de Certeau's tactics and strategy (de Certeau 2011 [1988]) and Gilroy's (2004) concept of conviviality. But these two are too often held separately from one another. In the following chapter I attempt to outline an approach which might accommodate the bludgeoning impact of capital on a neighbourhood such as Brixton, at the same time as the subtle complexities of identity and difference as they are constituted and contested in the realm of the everyday. The following chapter will argue that an epistemological messiness is required for the way we make an account of a changing neighbourhood such as Brixton; a representation of the city that centres on contradiction and complexity.

This chapter has argued that the messiness of everyday life is productive and political, and that when spaces such as markets are seized and re-organised in the name of the efficiency of capital production the community lose control over a space through which they might have imagined and produced themselves. Through research which accommodates this messiness as it continues to exist in the city, and respects its indifference to being categorised and structured I suggest that society can be illuminated from a different perspective – offering an image of a neighbourhood such as Brixton which strives not to reproduce or valorise existing structures even as it attempts to critique them.

4. Is There Such a thing as Authentic Research?

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the epistemological and methodological approach of this project and discuss it in relation to the theoretical concerns discussed in the previous two chapters. Firstly the chapter will attempt to establish a messy epistemology, directly picking up from the end of the previous chapter and using Ruth Glass' work to advocate for the necessity of an urban epistemology which incorporates mess, complexity, and contradictoriness and does not attempt to organize the life out of the city. I will argue that Ruth Glass' work has been filed under 'gentrification' at the expense of her greatly nuanced epistemology of the city that bears more relation to contemporary feminist critique than it does to gentrification scholars such as Chris Hamnett or Neil Smith. Subsequently I will outline the ways in which the research questions and research design have been developed in order to retain this sense of mess without becoming politically neutered. The impossible aim of this research project is for a truly authentic and unalienated research process, by which I mean a research project where the priority is to form a representation of the researcher's experience, not to validate external structures of analysis. This project sustains a hopefulness that it is possible to represent the messy reality of the everyday and to relate it to broader economic and political structures, whilst acknowledging that such representations are inevitably partial. Finally I will introduce the research methodology through a sustained ethnographic account of being new at the two main sites in this project, this account provides an opportunity for a more complex and personal assessment of the strengths and limitations of this research methodology.

The previous chapter argued that it is through the intricate and sometimes banal messiness of the everyday that the means of urban life are produced. To read Brixton only through an apparently rational analysis of capital movement (e.g. Smith 1979), or as a smooth shift in the desires of city dwellers (e.g. Ley 1986) would be to neglect the scruffy quotidian ontologies which constitute the field of study from below. In order to observe the impact of alienating economic structures (Marx 2000) it is important to recognise the granularity of effect that such grand structures produce. I have adopted an epistemology which works to accommodate the messiness of the neighbourhood and not perform premature exclusions of data. Recently Barnett and Bridge have observed that "the constitutive messiness of concepts of urban living is an index of the problematizing orientations through which these concepts take on their significance" (2017:16). This is a response to an article considering the ontological and epistemological challenges presented by debates over what a city is and how it functions as an object of study. The argument they make in this quote is that it is from the messiness that makes cities hard to describe that the terms used to describe them derive their meaning. This chapter chooses to avoid any discussion of what a city is and instead focus on establishing an epistemology and a methodology which can accommodate an object of research which resists attempts to define it.

Buck Morss has described part of the Benjaminian methodology as “paying strict attention” (1991:146), representing the world with a fine grain and allowing the internal contradictions to stand beside each other. Social science should be seeking to make an ‘authentic’ representation of society that might illuminate and challenge the way that we consider the world we live in. Authentic research sounds like a lofty ideal, however the ideal form of data that for the purposes of this project is partial, contradictory and incomplete. Given the impossible challenge of representing the city, impartiality is impossible and partialness is inevitable. In chapter 2 I tried to develop two notions of authenticity – alienated and un-alienated authenticity – the first claim for authenticity rests on a semiotic semblance the second on a phenomenological entanglement. In this research I have attempted as far as possible to produce and represent an un-mediated representation of the field. Naturally this is a ridiculous goal, and as a researcher my body and language are inevitably malfunctioning machines of sensation and representation. But to attempt to tidy up data in the hope of gaining a superior point of view is to seek only an alienated authenticity and to promote distance between reader, researcher and subject.

Section 4.2 of this chapter will use Ruth Glass’ introductory essay in *London Aspects of Change* (1964) as a starting point for the messy epistemology which will underpin this thesis. Ruth Glass resisted theorising the city and in this essay represents London as an object which speaks for itself. Her essay will be brought into a broader epistemological context with reference to those who have advocated for such forms of knowledge (e.g. Haraway 1988, Law 2004). Section 4.3 will outline the research design of this project, one based primarily around an ethnographic approach. Ethnography has become an area of increasing interest to the social sciences at large because of its capacity to answer such concerns about mess and complexity. For example, health geographers S.J. Lewis and A.J. Russell have observed, this is because “it can deal with complex, fluid contexts and their emergent and unanticipated issues” (2011:409). Interestingly they frame this wider interest in ethnographic methods in the context of “strictures placed upon it by ethics approval procedures and the like” (Lewis & Russell 2011:398). With this in mind the final section of this chapter will reflect further through a small section of empirical material with the aim of representing the methodological strengths and limitations of this project in a way that situates the approach in the actual context of the field, so as to provide a reflexive and messy introduction to this project.

4.2 *A messy epistemology*

This section outlines the epistemology at work in this thesis. This is important because this epistemology is the foundation of the methodology of this project but also the discussions that emerge from the empirical data. This approach is guided by my engagement with the literature in the previous chapter, but also by the people I came to know during my fieldwork. At the restaurant and the soup kitchen I spoke to people who had seen neighbourhoods change all over London. Particularly at the soup kitchen I met people who had suffered because of these changes, they've seen people move out and people move in and they've found themselves pushed to the edges – everything changes but nothing seems to get any better. The political discussions I was privy to in my research (e.g. chapter 8) represented the sheer chaos of a phenomena like gentrification. Whilst this is ostensibly a methodology chapter I wish to emphasise that my methodology and my epistemology developed throughout the research process. Any charade that this was a coolly planned research project simply and successfully put into action in the field would be to admit failure before I start.

Using this Ruth Glass' introduction to *London Aspects of Change* (1964) as the starting point I wish to emphasise the importance of allowing the object of study to be the model for the epistemology that defines its representation. This may seem to be stating the obvious but through a discussion of complexity and mess that begins with an account of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) I develop an argument that politicises the oversimplification of identity. Similarly I argue, following Law (2004) that faced with too much information urban space has too often been tidied up in order to make clearer sense of it, and this should be seen as an approach in which important information is sacrificed and a representation of messy reality is made more flawed in the interest of making it appear to be more coherent.

In Shin, Lees and Ernesto Morales' recent introduction to their special issue of *Urban Studies* (2016) they return to Louis Wirth (1938) to put forward their view that comparative gentrification studies can provide a valuable means to identify 'essential characteristics' in global cities. They make efforts to distance the term gentrification from its 1960s origins and its coiner, Ruth Glass when they offer their definition of gentrification:

We have moved far from that time and place, and come to understand that gentrification as a concept refers to the commodification of space accompanying land use changes in such a way that it produces indirect/ direct/ physical/ symbolic displacement of existing users and owners by more affluent groups. (2016:458).

In chapter three I argued that the way gentrification is spoken about colloquially is just as significant as the rumbling debates that continue between those who have made their career from this term. In referencing Glass here I do not wish to enter into those debates but to make an epistemological intervention. In distancing gentrification from Ruth Glass we don't just leave a historical context behind but an epistemological position which sharply contrasts with that of Louis Wirth.

Ruth Glass' career was consistently overlooked and marginalized. As a woman, a Marxist, a German, and a Jew, her career faced numerous obstacles. When she died in 1990 no one seems to have made the effort to preserve her archives, despite spending her entire life attempting to produce another survey of *London Life and Labour* (following Booth 1891). Instead when Andrew Harris invited a number of her colleagues to speak in a February 2014 session designed to celebrate her contribution to Urban Studies the sexism of the era loomed large in the recollections made of her career. Ruth Glass's work far exceeds the single word 'gentrification'. In the Introduction to *London Aspects of Change* (1964) she lays out an intensely radical image of London which offers far more than one word to the present day scholar of the city.

She presents London as a site of constant change, still marred by violence, both the shadows of war and, ongoing rapid social change. She is writing in a period in which London is still recovering from the war "Though most of the bomb sites are no longer empty, London is riddled with self-inflicted injuries, which cannot be easily patched up" (Glass 1964:xxvi). London at this time was a space of rapid change, of suburbanisation, of economic growth, and it was a source of growing "fear" what Glass called, "fear of the giant" (1964:xxvii). The London she describes is stifled by traffic, there are "armies of commuters" (1964:xiii), neighbourhoods are "invaded by the middle classes" (1964:xviii). One could slip into a rhetoric of polarisation, of a city of extremes, of a stratified urban fabric riven by hierarchy. However she is strongly resistant to the tidying up done by the rhetoric of "dichotomous terms", not because she doesn't recognise the contradictions in the city, quite the contrary, but because in the use of such constructions as epithets or "idees fixe" these linguistic moves can "be accepted as substitutes for more thorough perhaps more unpalatable analyses" (1964:xxiii). Glass seems to be suggesting that useful research should be challenging, complex, and hard to swallow if it is to succeed at all in reflecting the subject matter. That if you are producing clean crisp terms of analysis then a messy reality is being obscured, in clear contrast to Louis Wirth's "essential determinants" (1938:7).

The London Ruth Glass describes is chaotic and complex, it is rife with contradiction, yet as shown, these contradictions are not simple polar opposites but the fabric of a shifting and amorphous city whose reality is unpalatable to the mainstream. Throughout the text we are confronted with contradiction: "diversity of consumption" with "conformity" (1964:xiv), the "juxtaposition of new and old both in the fabric and structure of society" (1964: xiii-xiv), "social distances [...] both shorter and longer". Glass was very clear that the work of social science entailed the observation of "contradictory tendencies" (1964:xvi). These ambiguities are not merely a matter of representation, she also makes clear statements regarding the nature of social difference that appear to pre-empt discussions that are still being had today.

"Conventional terms of social categorisation, such as 'black-coated worker' or 'white collar worker', no longer have a straightforward descriptive value" Glass (1964:xiv) writes in a clear suggestion that typical class identity

is losing its face value. However she is not surrendering a structural Marxist reading of class position altogether, social distances are both “shorter and longer” (xvi). “What is happening” she claims, “is neither an obliteration nor an accentuation of long established class cleavages, but the superimposition of a criss-cross web of social divisions, which has as yet been hardly recognised” (xxii). At the heart of Ruth Glass' writing about London is a decidedly sceptical approach to positivist categorisation of the city, a willingness to accommodate contradictory observations and an overall conception of the city as a site of ambiguity. London for Glass is rife with uncertainty. For Ruth Glass the rapid changes that are going on in the city that she lives in be it 'gentrification' the homogenisation of culture and consumption, the wave of what she calls 'newcomers' (see Glass 1960) who move to Britain at this time; these changes are not annihilating the long established cleavages that have formed historical rents the city, but adding to the complexity of social difference as a whole. It is an anachronistic reading of Glass' work, but she might be said to be adopting an intersectional view of society.

Leslie McCall (2005), in her article on the possibility of intersectional methodologies equates intersectionality (citing Crenshaw 1989) with complexity. McCall citing N.K. Hayles (1989), a literary theorist who has written on chaos theory and literature, argues that complexity does not mean unpredictability, and that to jettison “predictability and linear explanation does not mean that anything goes: reality is complexly patterned but patterned none the less” (McCall 2005:1794). However whilst complex data may contain patterns, the recognition of a pattern is not a definitive act. Talking about scientific laboratory research John Law has observed the processes by which the researcher faced by “too much reality to bear” over time begins to discern patterns and similarities that help them navigate - yet the process of seeing “‘the right’ similarities” is intense and requires the researcher to “delete ‘the wrong’ similarities and differences” (2004:107). In complex data many possible patterns may co-exist. Central to the idea of maintaining a messy epistemology is to try to resist making such deletions and leave such selections to the latest point possible.

Urban space vehemently resists classification. It resists comprehension at every moment. It is a roaring and sensuous voice – a sea of difference rife with perilous inequality and crushing violence. Too often the approach to such chaotic places has been to dominate them through a reproduction of already dominating structures; a tidying up of the messiness of the urban. In Glass' writing she has accepted neither the mountain top perspective of Robert Moses, nor an acritical *dérive* at street level. In her introduction to *London Aspects of Change* (1964) Glass accommodates the too-much-to-bear-ness of the city and prioritises the affective quality of the shimmering chaos of London over an effective systematisation of it.

In *the Dialectic of the Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer write that “Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence. It makes the dissimilar comparable by reducing it to abstract quantities” (1997:7 [1944]). It is exactly this clean

unified epistemology that Ruth Glass resists in her writing about London. It is in that resistance that her work – since reduced to the word 'gentrification' – finds its radicalness. Adorno and Horkheimer use the image of Odysseus and the Sirens to explore the dialectic of the enlightenment. They show Odysseus tearing his self from the danger of total sensuous knowledge in order to subjugate it, and his sailors accepting sensual submission in order to navigate the ocean in clean discrete oar strokes (1997:36). In Glass' writing I suggest that there is both a keen reading of structural inequality as well as a sense of the chaotic messiness that the city's fabric presents. When Adorno and Horkheimer write “in a world that verified only evidential propositions and preserved thoughts – degrade to the achievement of great thinkers – as a kind of stock of superannuated clichés, no longer to be distinguished from truth neutralised as a cultural commodity” (1997:40) It chimes remarkably with Glass' own words about *idées fixes*, cited above.

Dialectic of Enlightenment was not published in English until 1972, however it appeared in German in 1944, and it is tempting to imagine Ruth Glass reading it. If she had it may have been with a sceptically raised eyebrow as she was not one to indulge in theory and postulation, nor to be drawn by the allure of those who do. Perhaps this is one reason her work remains neglected, it is also the reason that she should be reappraised. To adopt an epistemology of messiness should not be a purely conceptual move, but should be achieved in practice. Since Glass, feminist approaches to the city have emphasised complexity and contradictoriness as fundamental. If one allows oneself to range through the city, as Glass does, letting one's position and scale of observation shift, perhaps one can preserve the messiness of the city in the way that an account is made of it. I do not mean to deny structural inequality, nor do I wish to embark upon a project of post-modern obfuscation, and this is the value of returning to Glass. She was no waffling theorist, she was all too reluctant to write, she was dedicated to empirical methods and to making a practical intervention. None of this came at the expense of acknowledging the frankly obvious ambiguities at the heart of the urban.

In the accounts of Brixton's transformation that I heard from people during my research at the soup kitchen, Brixton was a stand in for all of the layers of oppression to which they had been subject in their lives. It was no simply defined economic function, it was not something that could be discerned in the undulations of house price data instead it was violence against their bodies, against their souls, against their home – and they didn't hold out much hope that it would change. Because when you've spent your life being thrown against a car by a policeman, or choking on drugs you swallowed when trying to conceal them during an arrest, or trying to stay clean to make your dying mother proud of you; then maybe you get used to change.

The violence that occurs when a neighbourhood becomes recognised as an opportunity to make substantial profit is not something which should be limited to a term of analysis such as gentrification. Its study should

not be restricted to its identification and critique. There is also an important role for research which records the bodily and chaotic impact of such processes on the lives of those who experience them. Ruth Glass demonstrated a messy epistemology in her account of London in 1964; and whilst the economic and social conditions have changed the chaos and contradiction at the heart of London remain. Studies of gentrification often reference Ruth Glass in an attempt to anchor the theoretical genealogy of their work, however this is more often than not merely a semantic family tree at the expense of a politically radical epistemology which can inform and challenge the way we think about changing neighbourhoods in the city. Ruth Glass' intellectual legacy has been too easily reduced to one word. Ruth Glass' maiden name was Lazarus, so perhaps it should be unsurprising that the term gentrification has refused to die. I am arguing that it is high time that we roll back the stone on the rest of her intellectual legacy. The methodology that will be advanced in the rest of this chapter aims to produce a messy and sensuous knowledge of the city that defies classification and knows that the city is hard to know.

4.3 A Methodology for Authentic Research

4.3.1 Ethnography

Brixton is the primary frame for my fieldwork. Within that I have focused on two sites, a restaurant in Brixton Village Market, and a soup kitchen. Rather than defining the field with a boundary these two sites, about five minutes from each other and a similar distance from the underground station, and the walkable distance between the three loosely describes the way that I spent time in Brixton. In this research I have observed some of what is at stake whilst the neighbourhood changes, how this is contested, and how this links to personal experiences of the other, whether it be food, culture, society, the state, or all of the above. This has allowed me to develop an exploration of authenticity – as a way of thinking about identity and how people seek to anchor themselves in a place that is in flux, and of alienation – the way that I have chosen to characterise the experiences that are produced by such urban change. In rejecting a political economy approach to urban change, or a wholly 'everyday' one (see chapter 3), through which structural influences are sometimes downplayed, I have been able to carry out my research in a way which has allowed me to capture the kind of messy knowledge discussed in the previous section. This section will relate the ethnographic methodology to the theoretical concerns already laid out in this thesis.

Gibson-Graham, in their feminist critique of political economy, argue that the blanket term "Capitalism" needs to be pulled back to reveal "a variety of things wriggling beneath it" (2006:261). Similarly I have sought to develop a methodology which reveals complexity rather than developing blanket terms. Gentrification is

one such blanket term and this project has sought to intervene by revealing the complex and messy effects of a changing neighbourhood (see also Barnett & Bridge 2017). Gibson-Graham advocate for ethnographic methods for their ability to “To rethink the economy using thick description and weak theory” (2014:149) in a reference to the ethnography described by Clifford Geertz (1973). My research has been influenced by Geertz for the same reasons, and by the somewhat Benjaminian notion of thick description in particular.

“It is not in our interest to bleach human behaviour of the very properties that interest us before we begin to examine it” (Geertz 1973:17). This quote encapsulates the methodological challenge presented by the epistemological argument explained so far in this chapter. For Geertz if the cost of producing grand theory is the actual detail of culture then it is a cost too high to bear. However, he is not suggesting that thinking about society and culture on a large scale are impossible; but that ethnography provides a particularly valuable reading when they make their analysis “from the direction of exceedingly extended acquaintances with extremely small matters” (Geertz 1973:21). By carrying out sustained and fine grained research I have been able to produce a narrative that partially captures the way that Brixton is changing and uncovers some of the chaotic processes that lie beneath the blanket of undeniably violent structural forces. Geertz states the aim of anthropology as the *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). Whilst culture and a reading of culture are central to this thesis they could hardly be seen to be its end goal. Like Gibson-Graham this is a project which seeks to make a clear political intervention in the way that Brixton, and cities in general, are researched and theorised.

4.3.2 *Walking, working and hanging around*

The restaurant and the soup kitchen are the key sites in this research project, but being between the restaurant and the Soup Kitchen as well as living between Camberwell, Brixton, and Peckham throughout the project have been very important to the slow accrual of information throughout the 12 months of fieldwork between the beginning of January and the end of December 2015. Whilst this information is not all accounted for in the empirical material included in this thesis the larger work of walking the neighbourhood and just hanging around were central to the way I familiarised myself to it. So whilst in one sense this is a “multi-sited” (Marcus 1995) ethnography, it is primarily a neighbourhood ethnography with my research sites joined together by the routes that I walked between them. Influenced by Gahlia Modan’s *Turf Wars* (2007) a project based in Washington D.C., I have tried to assemble a nuanced and thickly described set of data from the neighbourhood through walking through the area, building the kind of strong connections that one does as an involved citizen, and participating in the local arena, listening carefully all the time.

The decision to take a job at the restaurant as part of my fieldwork enabled me to encounter the market at first hand. I got to know the business in particular and the market in general, I was embedded in the social and economic networks that make up the market, and are discussed in detail in chapter 6. Through being a waiter I also came to meet and serve a large number of people. My colleagues and my employer were fully aware of my research, of course it was not possible to make customers aware of this – consequentially I have gone to efforts to ensure the anonymity not just for people also the business and the businesses of others that I spoke to, the detailed descriptions of the market may mean that businesses are identifiable to those familiar with the site. Philip Crang (1994) has written about the challenges of researching in your own occupation in his article *It's Showtime*. He was able to understand this business through more than consumption and customers, but instead through the inter-personal politics of its employees. I found that I had the same access at the restaurant. Like Crang my position as researcher did not provide any allowances in terms of the efforts that were required to be both a good employee and colleague. Like Crang I found much to write about in the techniques of customer service that were required of me as a waiter (see chapter 7).

Perhaps the most concise description of ethnographic fieldwork I have read is the one given by Alex Rhys-Taylor who spoke about the importance of “hanging around” (2013a:394) in his research in Ridley Road market in Dalston in East London. Just being in the market, observing and taking careful notes has been central to my ability to produce a thickly described account of the neighbourhood. It has allowed me to begin to be ‘a regular’ both in the market and at the Soup Kitchen, to become friendly with the people who figure in my research and to have a relationship sustained by smiles and nods with countless other people in Brixton – which is not to say that I wasn’t often told kindly to go away by some of those I approached to interview, memorably by one of the fishmongers near the train station. Suzanne Hall’s (2009, 2010, 2011) research on Walworth Road in South London made use of cafes in a similar capacity. And ‘sitting down’ and ‘hanging out’ as research methods are perhaps easy to malign, yet they often take a central role in the work of the ethnographer. Hall (2009) speaks about what the use of an everyday space such as a cafe reveals about the social organisation of the area.

At the soup kitchen where I volunteered I also aspired to become ‘a regular’. From the outset I was told by other volunteers that the aim should be that it wasn’t immediately obvious who was the service user and who the volunteer. I repeatedly told people I spoke to at the soup kitchen that I was a PhD student and that I was there in the capacity of researcher as well as volunteer, and I was repeatedly asked what I was doing outside of volunteering there. I don’t think this was a matter of collective forgetfulness! Instead it was because my existence as a researcher was mostly irrelevant to the people I came to know there. What was important was my presence as a volunteer, someone who brought out food, who shared long discussions and cups of tea, and was a good loser in the countless games of cards played (see chapter 8). As with the market the fact that

the soup kitchen is a well known institution in the area means that it has been hard to anonymise. These factors reinforced my decision to anonymise all people spoken to during this project and organisations and businesses where possible.

The method of ‘hanging around’, and perhaps of ethnography in general, brings with it the temptation to feel that one can *know* the people with whom one is spending time. The question of friendship and friendliness is much discussed by feminist researchers with regards to research and ‘objectivity’ (Irwin 2006, Haraway 1988, Kirsch 2005, Rose 1997). Rose has criticised the notion that a researcher can inoculate against power differentials with transparency and reflexivity alone, and that one must acknowledge that we cannot imagine that “we can fully understand, control or redistribute it” (1997:319). Kirsch (1988) and Irwin (2006) have reflected that intimate or friendly relationships do not annihilate difference or power relations, and that the position of researcher is fundamentally different. This line of thinking identifies the fundamental lack of certainty in research, even as complexity is acknowledged it remains unaccountable. In response to this I maintained an emphasis on disclosure, openness, and dialogue with those I met. Given the fact that I was not always confident that my role as researcher remained front of mind for people at the soup kitchen it was doubly important that I not forget the position of power and distance which ultimately characterizes the role of researcher.

This is a methodology that relies on writing at all stages of the process to inscribe and represent the data gathered. I took field notes at the end of the day as it never felt appropriate to take notes whilst at the restaurant or the soup kitchen. This has meant that there is relatively little verbatim material in this thesis, I paraphrased as accurately as possible and where I have been able to capture verbatim I have indicated it with quotation marks, otherwise paraphrased speech is kept out of them. In section 4.3.4 will outline the techniques of writing that are central to ethnography and that have been a major part of both my data gathering, my analyses, and naturally – the thesis itself. In the following section I will briefly discuss the more formal recorded interviews which have been part of this methodology.

4.3.3 Interviews

In order to supplement the data gathered through the ethnographic methods described so far I have also used ten unstructured interviews of between twenty minutes and two hours in length. They were all recorded with the verbal consent of the interviewees. Excluding one interview carried out via Skype these took place in Brixton in local cafes or inside the shops and cafes of the interviewees. These interviews were particularly valuable for speaking to business owners and people within institutions and gathering the information which has provided the political, economic, and historical context to this thesis. In particular this material is drawn

upon in chapter 6 in the detailed account of the regeneration of Brixton Village Market. Future research documenting the soup kitchen from a more historical perspective would benefit from further interviews with those who founded it and volunteer there. For the purposes of this thesis I have focused on the things I learned through spending time with the service users.

The interview material included here is based on loose discussions, those interviews carried out later in the process were enhanced by the fact that I was not only a researcher but also a familiar face in the market. This allowed me to have long and comfortable discussions with people and to draw out small details and thick descriptions. As with the ethnographic methods of this project the interview component was not intended to provide statistically representative data, but rather data which was partially but more deeply representative of the experiences of those to whom I spoke.

4.3.4 Writing analysis

“What does the ethnographer do? - he writes” (Geertz 1973:19) writing is what makes the ethnographer a research machine. The methodologies so far outlined gave me access to a wealth of data. The challenge then for the ethnographer is how to inscribe such data without removing its rich qualities in order to more easily examine it. The empirical material included in this thesis is the product of an iterative writing process through which I have made efforts to retain as much of the complexity of the material as possible. The two major techniques in doing so are narrative and poetics.

The analysis carried out of the data collected was rigorous but not exactly systematic, I did not code or categorise my diaries. Instead I read and re-read and wrote and re-wrote. In this way I was able to keep the urgency and the strength of experience as recorded during my first reflections of my research. Not to be overly selective or to over edit early in the process. Almost all of my research material here is recounted through fragments of narrative that are placed together thematically but also because of the times at which they happened and the spaces in which they occurred. Because of this I hope to have maintained some of the sense in which my research induced ideas in me and retain some of the initial instinctual analyses that are as much those of me as volunteer and waiter as they are of me as researcher. As I have already attempted to demonstrate in the use of literary material in the conclusion of chapter 2 the flows and counterflows which are the characteristics of captivating narratives were essential assets in my efforts to capture what was at times “too much reality to bear” (Law 2004:107).

Where possible I have made efforts to present sustained passages of ethnographic writing rather than breaking it up in the service of analysis. This approach has required great attention to the poetics of ethnography following the emphasis on the ‘graphy’ part of ethnography argued for by Clifford and Marcus (1986). Part of this work is to provide an account of the way that the changes effecting Brixton have been felt and responded to beyond the binary debates which are presented not only in mainstream media but also in social science accounts. In this way I am aiming to produce what Geertz terms an “actor-oriented account” (1973:14), the significance of this is particularly relevant to the discussion of conspiracy theories in chapter 8 and more broadly to the emphasis which I have put on identifying the politics in the everyday of the neighbourhood. This is what Geertz describes as an “imaginative act” not in the sense of it being false but because they are “something made” (1973:15). In order to convey a full sense of what I experienced I have made an account which dwells on details and tries to capture a quality of both richness and rawness in my prose.

4.3.5 History, archives and objects

Given my interest in authenticity the historical aspects of this project have proved important, particularly in chapters 5 and 6. In these chapters I have intertwined contemporary ethnographic material with archival and other historical research into Brixton’s past. A crucial reason for doing so is that I am not able within this thesis to provide an actual History of Brixton, a topic which has yet to be taken on by an academic. Instead this thesis is interested in history in so far as it plays a role in the present. Much of this thesis reflects on the debates about what Brixton is and who deserves to claim it as their own. It has been therefore valuable to think about the history of the neighbourhood from the perspective of the debates surrounding it.

I have drawn extensively on archival sources from the London Metropolitan Archive as well as a number of maps made available by the British Library. I have also referenced journalistic material both recent, largely the local news websites *Brixton Blog* and *Brixton Buzz*, and some older material from *The Times*. This material has become part of the narratives in chapter 5 and 6 about the way that Brixton has changed and the multiple ways that it has been represented. Again writing has been an important part of the representation of this material. Particularly in chapter 6 in which I have worked to produce a fragmentary account of Brixton’s history. It has been important that all of this material has been read in chapters which also incorporate contemporary empirical data in order to keep this historical perspective focused on the present moment.

An attentiveness to material culture and the built environment have been significant, it is through material objects that some aspects of Brixton’s history continue to echo. For instance the late Victorian era which saw

Brixton become a model retail destination still exists in the buildings. More significantly in chapter 6 I discuss how the cultural heritage may or may not be seen to actually exist in Brixton Village Market. This is an approach which draws on the work of a number of urban researchers. Suzanne Hall (2009; 2010; 2011), in her work on the Walworth Road made a detailed survey of the shop signs up and down the road, and her training as an architect informs a strong engagement with the built environment in the context of her ethnographic approach to the social make-up of the space. Alex Rhys-Taylor (2010; 2013a,b) in his work on Ridley Road Market has also incorporated an attentiveness to every day aesthetics in his research through his detailed account of the smells and tastes of his field site. This led me to be attentive to materiality in my field notes beyond the visual and to incorporate other senses in my account, taste in particular played an important role in chapter 7. This is a somewhat phenomenological approach, following Clare Melhuish's (2005 in turn drawing upon Norberg Schulz 1980) study of the Brunswick Centre in Bloomsbury which emphasised embodied and sensory perceptions of the space as a source of data.

From one perspective this research deployed a mixed-methodology approach. One might also think of it as a singular neighbourhood approach. The first part of this chapter argued that the city should be afforded a level of messiness and complexity, and that an epistemological shift was required to accommodate such messiness within many social science approaches to urban change. If such a messy epistemology is the end goal then a unified methodology becomes obsolete, the field-sites themselves demand a responsive approach by which the researcher's body becomes a sensing machine and an inscription device which produces data which captures such complexity.

4.4 On being new at the restaurant

I had finally gotten myself a trial shift at a restaurant in Brixton Village Market having spent various hours traipsing between businesses with my C.V. and being disappointed when initially positive responses failed to turn into phone calls. I was on my way to work now, and listening to Talking Heads really loudly, feeling enthused about my research finally beginning in earnest. A real anthropologist, the streets of Brixton transformed into a Pacific island beach – “surrounded by all my gear” (Malinowski 2014:3 [1922]) etc... Then of course I wheel round a corner on the short trip from Hayter Road where my girlfriend's flat was at the time and suddenly my enthusiasm is transmuted into appalling self doubt, who am I to write about this neighbourhood. Only a tiny fraction of Brixton was visible to me in that moment, but the vastness and complexity of the neighbourhood was fully in evidence; between the grand façade of the Ritzy Cinema, the hoardings surrounding the not yet opened Black Cultural Archives, drinkers in the square (who I have yet to know by name) and the square's name – Windrush.

From this grand vista and my apparently profound sense of smallness I slip down Coldharbour Lane where shops are changing hands week by week. Opposite the hair salon that employs a poet I know and the expensive looking art supply shop and gallery is the entrance to Market Row. Here I pass Rosie's, which was one of the small cafes that came to Brixton before it was cool to do so, and I walk into the covered market. Straight ahead of me is the very large greasy spoon – which seems to have been in business continuously for years, at one point during my research I'm told about an aged local gangster that holds court there on weekday mornings, I never meet him for myself. Khan's Cash and Carry, next door to the shop that sells uncategorisable things whose name I still don't know, the wine shop that I go to when I try to impress my girlfriend's parents, the vintage shop with its large proprietor who at various points during my research could be found reclining on a huge chair designed to look like an oyster shell.

When I arrived at the shop it was still closed while the owner and her husband did some light plumbing, and the chef prepped for service. I'd popped my head through the door a week before in response to an ad hung in the window asking for front of house staff. Frankly my experience was lacking, but I somehow managed to convince them between a brief chat and a brief C.V. that I might be the man for the job. I had only worked in a café once previously – and it had been in 2007 and for about a month. At the time I had found the experience very difficult so I was feeling nervous as I opened the door and smiled at Mary. It was a very small space and it was full of activity, apparently the fat trap had recently been removed from beneath the sink. Mary told me that I ought to be very grateful that it was gone as it would have been my job to clean it out. I felt like I was new at school trying to read the way that people spoke to each other and insert myself into the scenario with attempted humour.

At the same time I wanted to assure Mary that I was attentive and hard working, I wanted the job for the sake of my PhD, but I also felt that I needed to prove first that I could be a fully competent member of staff, and not solely a pretentious student. After two weeks of shifts I broached the topic of my research with Mary and she consented for me to write about the business, I separately informed and discussed my research with all of my other colleagues at the restaurant and it became a common point of discussion at work. The first thing that happened was that Mary offered me a coffee. She made me an Americano and vaguely talked me through the process as she did so. It tasted warm and nutty, not as acidic as some 'speciality' coffees. I said so to Mary and she told me about the roastery in South London, only about twenty minutes by bus. We went through the menu and I tried to show some of my knowledge about food without being obnoxious. Mary took me through some of the middle eastern terms on the menu which I was unfamiliar with. Mary brought me a spoonful of dukkah – a mixture of herbs nuts and seeds that would be sprinkled on labneh – a strained yoghurt. She opened up a jar of za-atar (a herb mix) and offered it to me to smell – it was to be sprinkled on top of flatbreads with oil

and feta before being cooked in the oven as a starter. Harissa, confit garlic, mint oil, hummus and various other components of the menu were wafted under my nose.

Whilst I was being given a sensory tour of the business I was also being given an administrative one. I learned which items on the menu secured the best margin for the restaurant, I was introduced to the till system which ran on an iPad. How to make coffees, how to make tea, where the olives were kept, what all the wines were, the key code to get into the back, how to unlock the storage fridge, I was told how to write up an order for the kitchen using a code scrawled onto one of the menus and which glass was used to serve which drink. It felt like a vast amount of information.

Leo managed to get the tap fitted to the sink, the whole morning had been so far interspersed with small amounts of bickering over the process. Leo was clearly intensely irritated by the problem and was getting frustrated as he discovered that the tap they had wasn't going to fit properly. Having found a temporary solution he then tested it and realised that he had mixed up the hot and cold taps – we would just have to deal with it – it was decided. So the restaurant could open, I started wiping down tables and arranging cutlery and menus. When the first table came in which was not too long as it was now lunchtime, Rosie took their order and suggested in hushed tones that I should listen in. This wasn't hard as the restaurant was hardly bigger than a student's living room.

Then it was down to me, there was much to remember. The first pair were Americans who had apparently been in earlier in the week, they were on holiday and recognised the chef and waved at him. I suggested they have a starter with their mains and they were convinced, my first successful upsell! Two mothers arrived outside and Mary suggested I go out to help them in with their buggies, on a quiet day there was space for two buggies in the restaurant. I smiled at the babies, but then felt embarrassed. As the orders went out the washing up came back, doing the washing up was a major part of the job. Working at the restaurant was a sort of combined front of house and kitchen porter role. Over my first few shifts I remember feeling my skin tire and dry from soap and damp and I built up nicks and cuts that were slow to heal.

It was easy for me to become fluent in the language of the restaurant, as a 28 year old student the grammar of a mid-price café was well engrained in my brain. I was worried about being good at my job, being a good waiter, my fears were to do with practice; whereas I was confident from the first that this was a place where I was welcome. My poshness, my 'foodie-ness', my age, my moustache, my glasses provided me with the ideal uniform for the restaurant. Culturally I was at home – yet with work and low pay my enthusiasm would soon wear thin.

4.5 On being new at the soup kitchen

In April I did my first shift at the soup kitchen, Kelley had told me when to arrive. Kelley tended to take responsibility for the laptop and the emails. Even when she was not able to come in as regularly, she would often pop in to make sure Jacob or Mo had made it to a meeting, or to deal with the contents of an email. When I got there it was all locked up so I leant against the wall and waited. It is in a part of Brixton which feels peripheral for people like me, who have tended to go to the markets and other areas near the tube station. However people who live in Brixton it is quite central, close to the dense housing that lies to the south of Coldharbour Lane around Somerleyton Road. This housing is mostly represented to unfamiliar passersby by the ‘barrier block’ the Marioland brutalist building of the Somerleyton estate.

Jay gave me the tour after he’d gotten me to put out the cereal, milk, and hot water flask. Jay is one of the three giant men who are the most visible volunteers at the soup kitchen, along with founders Mo and Jacob. Of all the volunteers Jay is probably the person with whom I came to spend the most time, mainly whilst playing blackjack, a very competitive card game which will come to form the central axis of my time at the soup kitchen and is discussed in detail in chapter 8. I felt quite awkward during that first visit, and early conversations with service users left me slightly nervous. The easiness with which issues like mental health, addiction, and crime were introduced into conversations over ten a.m. cups of tea made me immediately feel out of my depth. In time I learned that the distance between my life experience and some of the service users would never reduce, but through just speaking and being in the presence of these people there were other ways for the level of mutual alienation to be reduced.

It was the week before the Reclaim Brixton Protest, which had been widely publicised, there was a quiet rumbling of anticipation running through the centre of Brixton. However at the soup kitchen the other volunteers appeared fairly nonplussed. Kelley said that she didn’t care too much about it but she was “going on Facebook”. In the kitchen with Kelley helping to prepare lunch by removing frozen spicy chicken legs from their vacuum packs and placing into the oven with Kelley, I felt a long way from the Brixton that I worked in when at the restaurant. Nobody knew the restaurant that I worked at, nor did they seem particularly familiar with the market as it is today. My first visit to the soup kitchen left me feeling naïve and distant I had wrote things after my shift like “who are the people here? Why here?” over the time I spent at the soup kitchen I slowly became familiar with this place, at least even whilst I felt distant from many of the people I felt like I had a place there.

Jay had tried to teach me how to play blackjack, but his patience ran out after I lost a series of hands. People at the table were talking about where they came from, one red-headed man was giving a précis of his life story

before another took his term. DK, with deep wrinkles lean to the point of stringiness was telling us that he was born in 'Rhodesia', a few people registered this and the redheaded man said "like Zimbabwe?" DK replied, "I don't see why I have to call it Zimbabwe, it was Rhodesia when I was born there and when I left". This made me feel immediately awkward, I made the judgement that DK was a racist. This would prove to be an unfair assumption, but I was nervous of everything. I was particularly nervous about race, I had been in the relatively white and middle class enclave of Brixton Village Market and I was fearful that I would be incapable of escaping it in my research. When Mo arrived I was sitting with some of the service users trying to be relaxed and join into the conversations around me. He told me that he couldn't immediately tell me if I was a volunteer or a service user, and that was really important. The soup kitchen aims to be a space where no one is pre-judged and instead we sit together eat and play cards and speak freely.

During my second visit to the soup kitchen I found the awkwardness and out of placeness that I experienced come painfully to a head. There were a lot more volunteers there that day and I felt obsolete, I also didn't know any of them and as they spoke to each other and the few people I did know I am embarrassed to say I felt excluded. Shameful especially in hindsight, knowing how friendly everyone was to me during my trips to the soup kitchen. I hadn't been for a couple of weeks since my first visit and I decided to just turn up as my previous attempts to communicate by email were failing. I felt ignored at the time but now know that it was simply not a channel of communication that was dealt with very swiftly.

I tried to play Jay at Blackjack but I kept losing, I was so bad at the game at that point. The fieldnotes I wrote were sparse, I felt sad and like I was failing in my role as an anthropologist when I reached home, however I did write down that the sympathy I received for being so bad at blackjack was "actually a welcome feeling". I left even before lunch, I spent some time just sitting on my hands without anything to do, I felt cold so I went to get my coat, or perhaps I was just putting it on for something to do, I can't remember now. But somebody asked me if I was leaving – rather feebly this made me feel like I was being asked to leave. I interpreted a vague bit of small talk as a passive aggressive slight, and I just said yes and left. On the way out I said to one of the volunteers whose name I didn't know at the time "I haven't done much" and they replied "its just good you're here".

These initial visits to the soup kitchen seem distant given six months of visits that came afterwards. Whilst at first I made myself feel uncomfortable I came to feel entirely at home there, not because of my own efforts but because of the efforts of both the volunteers and the service users to make me feel welcome. From the outset my feeling of awkwardness came despite the kindness of people there. Whilst culturally and socially I anticipated that I would be judged, I rarely was. References to my race or class position were made within jokes or banter, mostly I was just one more person with their own history. Whereas at the restaurant I felt culturally

comfortable the slow and inevitable agony of work created a grueling experience of alienation from customer and colleague alike. At the soup kitchen I immediately felt a huge distance from the people I came to know there, however a basic assumption of total difference and the fact there was little or no scope for relationships based on the alienated authenticity of resemblance I was left having just to talk to people and build interactions which negotiated alienation not through false claims of similarity but through more essentially human forms of encounter.

In the following pages I will first reflect on this as an aspect of ethnographic research, that the researcher inevitably experiences and negotiates distance between them and those they seek to learn about. Second I will contrast my experience of alienation with the way that those I worked with related to Brixton, opening up the discussion that will run through this thesis, that of authenticity and alienation.

4.6 Alienated researcher, authentic research

In Judith Okely's *Traveller Gypsies* there is a moment that she describes changing clothes in a layby between her fieldsite and a seminar in Oxford (1983:44). One of the challenges for Okely was doing fieldwork in her own country, where she was legible as middle class (1983:43). Performing the transition from library researcher to magical ethnographer (Stocking 1992) presents different challenges when one's journey to the field takes less than half an hour, as it did for me. There is an element of protection that can be derived from being totally alien to a place – for me both at the soup kitchen and the restaurant my identity was legible to the people I met and got to know. However my own sense of this legibility was the first obstacle for me to overcome given that I quickly came to recognise that few people really cared that I was writing a PhD. I answered the question time and again – “what are you studying?”. But the most important thing for me to do was fulfil the role I was given there whether as waiter or volunteer, it was through being there and doing my job that I was able to win some trust.

At the restaurant being a student did not mark me out at all amongst my colleagues. Everybody who worked there, barring the owner, was a student or in the case of the chefs, a freelancer. As a consequence there was an expectation that everybody there had a ‘real life’ and that working in the restaurant was, as it was for me, a means to bolster an otherwise small income (with another small income). I found myself reminding people that the restaurant was itself part of my research, but time and again I found people asking me how my PhD was going as if it were something that I was pursuing exclusively elsewhere. This has added support to my decision

to anonymise all the interactions from my research. There were a few who did recognise that I was there to do research, particularly the owner, but this was largely manifest as jokes to do with me ‘spying’. Ultimately my research became irrelevant when compared to my reliability as a colleague, my ability to upsell or my mastery of latte art.

By July when I cut down my hours at the restaurant almost to nothing, I had “gone native” in the least glamorous way imaginable. This was not a religious conversion rather it was a consequence of the job, I had lost sight of my research questions and simply ploughed on with my job as a waiter. During May and June my work load had become particularly high and I was working more than five shifts during some weeks, the physical exertion of being a waiter reached the point at which I felt unable, or certainly unwilling to take fieldnotes. At various such points my fieldnotes disappear or shrivel to fragmentary sentences. Obviously this is a limitation for my research, however I would also suggest that it is evidence of the kind of labour that sustains the businesses that are transforming Brixton’s markets. The kind of labour that is driving urban regeneration throughout London – the swaggering image of the hipster-barista – forgets that these jobs are inevitably poorly paid and often difficult or unpleasant.

Culturally and socially I was comfortable working at the restaurant, but ultimately I experienced the alienation that such precarious labour conditions might be expected to produce. As I got to know my fellow employees it became clear that this was not an uncommon situation. I should be clear that I don’t think this was unique to the workplace, nor do I think it was due to particular failings on the part of the owner. In fact she also experienced the pains and economic hardship of the industry. It is important to make this point because the common dichotomy between posh café and working class café sitting on either side of the gentrification divide is a vast simplification. It was clear that some of the businesses were “coining it” – though I got no sense that their staff were particularly enthused by their work – but the vast majority of the small businesses associated with gentrification in Brixton were operating on the very margins of profitability. Whilst working as a waiter my initial comfort and enthusiasm was worn down shift by shift. At the soup kitchen whilst I initially felt out of place I ultimately felt that I belonged there.

New into this research I found myself wrapped up in a space which was designed for me, not as a researcher but as a worker. The restaurant perfectly fitted my own social and cultural capital and privilege. As yet another waiter with another career I fit in very well. In fact the nature of the staff, that so many of us had other work to do, as artists, students, writers, and so on meant that the rota was an incredibly painful task. The restaurant was a comfortable environment, the customers and the commodities familiar to me from my own life. This familiarity became almost coercive, as one feels like one knows one’s boss, and recognises their situation it becomes harder to resist their demands on their employees. In a sense it was the comfort I felt that ultimately

exacerbated by experience of alienation in that I came to accept the poor precarious labour conditions of the job. It also presented challenges to my fieldwork as I swiftly changed from valiant ethnographer to jaded waiter.

The soup kitchen on the other hand was designed and selected as a sharp contrast to the restaurant. My girlfriend once referred to it – with tongue firmly in cheek - as my ‘blacktivity’ which irked me significantly. However she was in some ways right. It is true that the market was a predominantly white space and the soup kitchen had been founded by and was largely run by black volunteers. My decision to incorporate the soup kitchen into my research was a result of my desire not simply to study myself, and my peers. Richard Fox called it a “[p]ursuit of the romantic” (1977:8) driving urban anthropologists towards the marginalised. However as I began my research an initial sense of alienation, described above, was soon superseded by shame. Because it became clear that the distance I experienced initially was not because I had found myself in an autonomous “culture of poverty” (Lewis 1971) but simply because I was a stranger, and in a place where to deploy my familiarity with Muhammara (a spicy walnut dip) would do me no good. Where the economic labour of the restaurant produced distance in a setting I found initially easy to inhabit, at the soup kitchen it was partly through the social labour of simply turning up, talking and being useful, but mainly through the openness and friendliness of the environment that I found myself made to feel as welcome as I ever have in my life.

Having started out at the soup kitchen feeling a sharp sense of being in the wrong place I came to feel strongly embedded. It is important to be clear that whilst I did ultimately feel a sense of closeness to those I knew there I was not deluded into thinking I had somehow overcome the gulf in experience between me and both the service users and volunteers. The painful moments described above would eventually seem distant, a number of times I was told I was ‘part of the family’, but ultimately when I decided to stop going to the soup kitchen in order to begin to write up I felt both a sense of loss, and a sense of guilt as the ability and necessity of my walking away from the three days a week that I spent there only served to confirm both my power and my privilege.

After the second visit, recounted above, I remember leaving the soup kitchen almost in tears on my way home. Completely overwhelmed by a sense of my own failure as a researcher. In particular I felt guilty, I felt as if I were failing to be a good researcher and failing to be a good volunteer. At least at the restaurant I could fall back on my ability to do the washing up. I expected to find people who were ready to talk about ‘gentrification’ and the covered market, but of course they all had their own shit to worry about. I had begun to construct myself a Brixton identity, I had gotten to know people in the market, I worked in Brixton, I walked through it almost everyday. It was where I did much of my grocery shopping and socialising, and yet at the soup kitchen I realised that the Brixton I felt like I belonged to didn’t mean very much in this new context.

But the relationships I built at the soup kitchen grew over time, quite different to the relentless experience of serving stranger after stranger as a waiter. At the soup kitchen I learned the favourite foods and dietary requirements of the service users. I came to know who would want ketchup with their chips, who liked spicy food, who ate pork and who did not. This knowledge was the basis for the relationships I built, they were established through repetition. Just as my card playing nouse developed after hundreds of hands of blackjack, so did my familiarity with the volunteers and soup kitchen. It was not friendship or intimacy, it was clear that for most of the people I met our relationship was limited to the soup kitchen, yet I came to feel comfortable and relaxed at the soup kitchen. It was the repetitive and quotidian nature of my research which ultimately yielded the most important data for this thesis. The deep alienation that I felt at various points during the research was negotiated not through a pretense that I could actually feel apparently authentic sympathy for the people that I met during my research but through an unalienated authentic empathy. When people stop being pre-categorised subjects and places stop being recognizably familiar to those in the research of others the sustained and long-term aspects of ethnography become truly invaluable. It was only through time and sort-of through tedium that I found a way to treat the circumstances of my fieldwork on their own terms and not on the terms established in my upgrade document.

In chapter 3 I argued that the messiness of cities observed at the scale of the everyday reveal not only the impacts of structural inequalities but also a space which is productive of society. As a consequence this project has required not only a methodology which would be capable of gathering data at this scale of observation but an epistemology which is capable of accommodating such a complex and fragmented reality. In this chapter, with Ruth Glass as a starting point, I have argued that through sustaining contradictions and sustaining different scales of observation - as well as incorporated sensuous and embodied forms of knowledge, it is possible to provide an account of urban space which is underrepresented in urban studies, and particularly with regard to gentrification and neighbourhood change. In order to produce this kind of knowledge I have used ethnographic methodologies supplemented by archival material. This ethnographic research has focussed in particular on developing thick forms of description (Geertz 1973) which have allowed me to represent Brixton in a complex and nuanced manner which allows the messiness of everyday life to pertain in the representation of my data. The final section of this chapter has reflected on the initial forays made in the two research sites. In reflecting on these experiences I have described the roles of alienation and authenticity in my own practice. Firstly the significance that my own cultural knowledge had in making me feel comfortable at the restaurant, my knowledge of 'authentic' middle eastern cuisine allowing me to position myself securely in a space in which through repetitive and tedious work I would ultimately find myself deeply alienated from (see 6.10). On the contrary at the soup kitchen I began by feeling culturally out of place but through repetitive presence and hours of tea and cards I gradually reached a mutually 'authentic' relationship with the people I knew at the soup kitchen whereby, in part, we related to each other in a way that was relatively unmediated. Not to say that my position as a middle

class academic researcher disappeared - far from it - but that the simple acts of day to day interaction became more important. In this way I have been able to approach something one might call authentic research and gather the data needed to produce this partial, messy, and hopefully incisive account of Brixton.

5. Claiming and Reclaiming Brixton

5.1 Introduction

This thesis has so far developed an approach to Brixton which values messiness over tidiness it attempts to accommodate the incoherence of a complex neighbourhood. At the heart of the project is the question of authenticity, when a neighbourhood is changing what does it mean to make a statement about what the neighbourhood is? That an object in a neighbourhood can be recognised as being somehow more correct because of its resemblance or connection to an external referent is a claim to authenticity which produces distance, or alienation, it rests on a tidy description of the object as well as a description which excludes other potential claims made over it. Brixton itself is such an object and in this project I do not wish to consider it as a cogent and solid object of study which can be defined clearly. In this chapter I will present the overlapping and contradictory narratives that produce the neighbourhood, I will argue that an authentic and unalienated depiction of Brixton should not gather it together but maintain the tensions that run through it. This chapter attempts to create such a messy depiction of Brixton, both in terms of the history of Brixton and specifically in terms of how these competing narratives continue to resonate in the present, but also the competing claims as to what the neighbourhood is and should be. In this chapter Brixton is introduced in earnest, and by creating an image of the neighbourhood which is partial and contradictory I lay the groundwork for the aspects of this thesis which explore what is at stake when someone claims to know what an authentic Brixton is.

This chapter will begin by introducing a number of different 'Brixtons' which find their origins in the neighbourhood's past. These contrasting Brixtons continue to circulate in the neighbourhood today. They are contradictory and complex, the history of Brixton is a messy one. To view the neighbourhood from the point of its emergence as a suburb is to witness a neighbourhood which has never stayed still. In the 19th Century Brixton moved from middle class enclave to a space for property speculation and development preceding a retail boom which continues to echo on both the Brixton high street and high streets across Britain. Following this it became associated with music halls and entertainment and a large amount of short term housing became available. This short term housing made the neighbourhood an ideal stopgap for transitory and migrant populations. In the twentieth century the neighbourhood's predominantly white lower middle classes were joined by Afro-Caribbean migrants, most iconically those who arrived on the Empire Windrush. Later in the twentieth century it was a place where British black identity established itself, a home for radical politics and squats, a milieu of subculture and musical experimentation, and a neighbourhood tarred with stigma in the national press following the 1981 uprising, or riot. This chapter will explore this oscillating and messy history and use it as the basis to ask the question - what is Brixton, and what do people want it to be?

This will set up the latter half of this chapter which is an ethnographic account of the 2015 *Reclaim Brixton* protest. This was a protest which grew initially from a plan to protest against network rail's intentions to evict their tenants from the railway arches. But it quickly grew into a vastly messy coalition of different causes relating to the transformation of Brixton. The notion inherent in the name of the protest, that Brixton needed to be reclaimed, imagines an authentic and real Brixton out there somewhere. The purpose of bringing together these contrasting images of Brixton and this protest is to highlight the difficulty of establishing a political response to neighbourhood change. Often the response is to try to protect what there is or return to what there has been without a clear perspective on what those things are or why they should be fought for. I will suggest that a platform which is based on such a politics of return can only ever be conservative and divisive – however progressive the politics is otherwise. To try to tether a cause to an imaginary notion of Brixton past is a form of alienated authenticity as discussed in chapter 2. Ultimately I will draw attention to the unalienated authentic politics that were also visible at the protest, and ask why a more successful political platform did not emerge from it. This chapter does not argue that history and identity are damaging to political causes, instead it suggests that if the conflicts and tensions that constitute Brixton in all of its messy glory are embraced rather than battled with, then perhaps we can imagine a more productive authentic neighbourhood politics.

5.2 Suburban speculation

Following the enclosure of common land and the building of Vauxhall Bridge in 1816 Brixton became an attractive place for city businessmen to live. In 1824 the consecration of St Matthew's Church "provided a focal point for the new community" (Hibbert et al. 2010:97). In an 1841 map of Brixton (Figure 2) the neighbourhood, that centred around the meeting of Acre Lane and Coldharbour Lane, appears as a suburb which remains somewhat rural. The windmill and penitentiary marked on the map are both still there, though the windmill is no longer functional. Arguably the windmill itself has been eclipsed by the pub and music venue nearby which for many is what the words 'Brixton windmill' refer to. In the 1841 map it is still possible to see a farm where Railton Road now runs.



Figure 2: Maps of Brixton

Left: Brixton 1841 (Source: Rees)

Right : Brixton 1879 (Source: Ordnance Survey)

Hibbert et al. record “the largest single development, and one of the last in suburban character was Angell Town, laid out in the 1850s” (2010:97). The grandeur of the development remains visible in the large houses on St John’s Crescent. The name Angell Town has now become associated with the Angell Town estate, notorious in present-day media for its association with gangs (e.g. Cohen 2015). Richard Dennis has commented about the mid 19th century era of suburban development in the global north: that “social segregation was built into every stage of financing building and marketing suburban estates” (2008:189). That the building of suburbia in 19th century London was a project of social design. Today the availability of large attractive 19th century properties are exactly what are bringing the wealthy back to Brixton. On the right of figure 2 is an 1879 map based on a survey carried out between 1868 and 1871; this map shows Brixton about a decade after the 1862 opening of the Brixton and South Stockwell train station, subsequently known solely as Brixton station and presumably providing a new anchor for the contemporary geography of Brixton. In this map the number of houses has increased and the area appears firmly and densely suburban, the clear space remains where the farm was situated, but it is not marked as a farm. Substantial house building appears to have occurred either side of Brixton Road which runs north of the junction between Coldharbour Lane and Acre Lane, the laying of numerous new streets has set out the structure of the neighbourhood which remains today.

In the wake of the train line the area was transforming commercially as well as residentially. In 1877 the first purpose built department store in London was built in Brixton. Bon Marche was named dreamily after its

Parisian counterpart and is iconic of a time when Brixton was an influential neighbourhood in the establishment of a modern form of retail. This moment of 19th century influence is echoed clearly in the present where once again the commercial environment of Brixton is defining national trends. Department stores, and notably Bon Marche, were making efforts to attract wealthy tourists (Dennis 2008:308) and to employ culture, and in particular the romantic image of the Eastern bazaar with the aim to “ally commerce and culture, to legitimise the former by demonstrating its compatibility with the latter” (Dennis 2008:312). The high street in Brixton is still built on the footprint of this era, and the buildings are part of the visual appeal of the neighbourhood. Today the local council is investing in “restoring [the] former glory” of Brixton’s 19th century retail-scape (Future Brixton 2017). In this way the speculative efforts of Victorian developers are being re-employed with the goal of ‘regenerating’ the neighbourhood today.

5.3 Street market and high street.



Figure 3: Brixton Arch Penny Bazaar around 1903 (Source: Marks & Spencer Archive)

Wealthy businessmen had been gradually replaced by “clerks and skilled workmen” following the opening of the trainline and new affordable access to central London (Hibbert et al. 2010:97). By the end of the 19th century the large houses were being divided into lodging houses, and easy access to the West End meant that these lodging houses were particularly attractive to theatre workers (Hibbert et al. 2010:97). A number of

cinemas and theatres opened in Brixton around the turn of the century and the area's association with popular culture began to emerge.

This busy neighbourhood attracted several new businesses. Notably Marks & Spencer opened its first London location in 1903 in one of the arches on Brixton Station Road (Stratton & Trinder 2000:179): the same arches whose evictions and refurbishment triggered the *Reclaim Brixton* protest in 2015 discussed later in this chapter. David Greig opened his first grocers shop in 1888 on Atlantic Road, the company would grow into a large supermarket chain with 156 shops in 1972 (Building Our Past 2016). The elegant design of the shops is still evident in a number of DG monograms still visible in Brixton and south London in shop frontages and flooring. British Home Stores, a brand that has at times been iconic of British retail success and more recently a cautionary tale was founded in Brixton in 1928 (Gosden 2015). The high street as we now know it found a valuable testing ground in the busy retail environment of Brixton in the late 19th and early 20th century.

On the street itself Brixton market gained a reputation for a characterful atmosphere and good value:

Life is very jolly in Brixton Street Market. Go down with an empty larder, a large shopping-basket and a carefree heart and you will enjoy yourself. But it is a market mainly for housewives, as its wares consist almost entirely of food. The food is fresh, clean, and very good value, while the stallholders are nearly all cheerful and obliging. They are also highly entertaining. (Benedetta 1936:31)

This is an account of the market published in 1936 in a collaboration between the author Mary Benedetta and photographer and Bauhaus stalwart Moholy Nagy. It captures Brixton village market at a commercial peak which encouraged Philip Granville Grossman to capitalise on the busy market and build Granville Arcade – now Brixton Village Market. Grossman submitted a planning application in the same year, this will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter where a more detailed history of the covered markets is provided (6.2).

Benedetta's account is half ethnography, half consumer advice as she captures both some of the economy and the atmosphere of Brixton Market at the time. Describing one fish stall she provides the following captivating detail:

You will find he wraps it up carefully in The South London Press. But you cannot expect grease-proof paper in a street market, and the reduction is well worth putting up with a little newsprint flavour. After all, you can always wash it off before you begin cooking if you imagine it is there. (Benedetta 1936:33)

Benedetta captures a vivid sense of the commercial cut and thrust of the street market, the scrutineering housewives and the canny stallholders, each one out to get the best of the other and each with full awareness of the situation. Benedetta describes the customers: “almost terrifyingly efficient over their buying and choosing” and she describes the stallholders “who provide the cheery atmosphere. They make Brixton Street Market – and they make it a gay, delightful shopping centre for anyone who wants to save their money”

(1936:36). According to Benedetta, Brixton at this time was a high street full of industry, customers nudging each other out of the way to get to whichever particular wares were most in demand that day, or assembling around stalls at the end of the day to pick up bargains as they were auctioned off. Much as today Brixton was a proving ground for new businesses and an opportunity for those who sought their fortune. It also seems likely that as the market peaked many businesses fell to the wayside, and we will see in the next chapter that Granville Arcade was not able to fill its tenancies.

5.4 *Windrush*

In a 1948 report for Pathé news, the calypso performer Lord Kitchener has a microphone held up to him. He is on the Empire Windrush at Tilbury Docks and he is introduced as the “spokesman” for the 500 Caribbeans who are newly arrived in Britain. Kitchener marks the iconic arrival of what will become known as the Windrush Generation with a calypso song *London is the Place for Me*. The 1948 Nationality Act gave British citizenship to people living in the British empire, or who had previously been a part of the empire. The vast majority of Caribbean migrants were skilled manual workers but in the late 1950s over 50% of them had “lower-status jobs than their skill and experience fitted them for” (Fryer 1984:374). The glossy image of the ‘Mother Country’ presented to West Indians at school was proven to be a vast overstatement: “Disappointment and disillusionment of many kinds were the everyday experience of the 1950s settlers” (Fryer 1984:374).

Black British settlers arrived to find a hostile and racist country, Peter Fryer suggests “more than two-thirds of Britain’s white population [...] held a low opinion of black people” and a third of them were “extremely” prejudiced and “generally felt that black people should not be allowed in Britain at all” (Fryer 1984:375). The writer Donald Hinds recorded his experiences for the Oral History Society, the persuasive advertisements in Caribbean newspapers “emphasizing Britain’s need for workers” (1980:49) led to the “decaying edifices” of tenements on Somerleyton and Geneva Roads (1980:49). The reception was not as generous as implied by the Pathé news reel.

Brixton was a point of arrival because initially some migrants were housed in a deep air raid shelter in Clapham and Brixton had the nearest Labour Exchange on Coldharbour Lane. People settled in Brixton not because the housing was cheap but because it was available. As mentioned above many of the grand houses of suburban Brixton had already been subdivided into rooms for rent:

When one’s white fellow workers were paying less than twenty shillings per week, the going rate for a single room was fifty shillings. Quite often where two or more people shared a room, each occupant was required to pay thirty shillings or more (Hinds 1980:50).

The geography of Brixton had come to accommodate the precarious lives of theatre workers and this provision gave an opportunity for canny landlords to exploit migrants who were being turned away elsewhere.

The politics of race and identity in the 1950s were as messy and jagged as they are now, albeit more overt and more endemic. There was a fear of Britain's black population; Donald Hinds comments on the groups of black men that would assemble on the streets in Brixton in the fifties, these men who were perceived as threatening "making the place look depressingly untidy". But Hinds writes that the white passers-by did not recognise "the crushing loneliness, which could prompt a man to cross a busy street to talk to another man for no other reason than the man was also black. A distinctive minority will forever be in exile" (Hinds 1980:50). Here the desolate situation that many migrants found themselves in produced an alienation which in turn produced a community. A community where solidarity was based on mere skin colour; which for that vicious third of the population appeared intensely threatening.

Stuart Hall in an interview with Les Back talks about being a teacher near Oval in South London, and speaking to white students who were on their way to Shepherd Bush or Notting Hill to get involved in "argy-bargy" with the black communities there around the time of the 1958 Notting Hill Riots (2009: 671). His school age white students were concerned that black migrants were "taking our women [...] taking our things" to which Hall responded "Do you mean these?" indicating their black classmates, to which they said "They're one of us" (Hall & Back 2009: 672). Hall comments "I became aware of how complicated local allegiances and images of the people outside are" (Hall & Back 2009:672). This was the landscape of identity in Brixton and it continues to be. The complex intersecting identities based on ideas of us and them are layered beyond easy comprehension; whilst it is now no longer acceptable to condemn young people on the street for their blackness – it is to condemn them for their 'gang-member-ness'.

5.5 Radicalism and squats

One of Lambeth Council's main office buildings is called Olive Morris House. In 1986 Olive Morris' mother Doris unveiled a plaque to mark the renaming of the building at 18 Brixton Hill (de la Torre 2007). Olive Morris had died in 1979 and in her brief life had played a major role in the activism that took place in Brixton during the seventies. In the same year that she died the *Squatters Handbook* (1979) was published and the photo on the cover showed her getting into a building on Railton Road that she and Liz Turnbull had squatted together in 1973, and became "the first successful squatters of private property in Lambeth" (Platt 1980:33). The plaque unveiling came towards the end of the era of radical municipal socialism at Lambeth Council led first by Ted Knight, and subsequently by Linda Bellos, this era faded away as Bellos was pressured into presiding over cuts

of £60 million leading to Knight, the previous leader, denouncing her (Times 1987:2). This moment cemented the symbolic presence of radical politics in Brixton but came as the era was coming to an end.

Olive Morris House, however radical the intentions of the council at the time, is a memorialisation of a political radicalism which contested the establishment directly rather than attempting to simultaneously occupy and destroy it (cf Gilroy 2002: 147-199). The radicalism of the council is not the epitome of the radicalism that existed in Brixton during the late sixties and seventies, but merely a symptom of a milieu of political contestation. Olive Morris was part of the Black radical politics that found a home in Brixton in the late sixties. In 1973 Morris was a founder member of the influential *Brixton Black Women's Group* (see Bryan et. al. 1985 and Bogle 1989) which was initially based in the property she is pictured getting access to on the cover of the *Squatters Handbook* (A.S.S. 1979). This was an organisation that was interested in both consciousness raising activities and support for women in the local community (Lewis 2011). This was an era in which Brixton, and in particular squatted properties in Brixton, provided a basis for activism which both critiqued the structural inequalities of the time and worked in the community to support those who were struggling from these inequalities in their everyday lives.

The British Black Panther movement was founded in Brixton in 1967 (Angelo 2009 Bunce and Field 2010). Whilst its existence was short lived it was an influential organisation and included members such as Darcus Howe who would go on to be one of the organisers of the *Black People's Day of Action* in March 1981 which brought 20,000 people to the streets and set part of the backdrop for the Brixton Riots in the following month (Szymanski 2011). The following section will deal with the events of the riots, or uprising, in particular, in some quarters they are synonymous with Brixton; but it is essential to consider the depth and radicalness of the organising that was occurring in Brixton during the seventies. AbdouMalik Simone, discussing the Black Power movement in America has argued that the performance of militancy drew the national gaze whilst at a local scale “specific instruments of black power [were] deployed within particular sectors, such as housing and social welfare or the control of municipal institutions” (2016:16). In Brixton the overt aspects of political action such as the riots, have left the community work of such organisations flying under the radar.

This might also be applied to the housing struggles which were fought from various squats in Brixton, most notably the Villa Road campaign that successfully protected from demolition a row of houses which had been turned into housing by squatters. These buildings had been part of the 19th century Angell Town development and were now being threatened with demolition as part of the council house building which included the more recent Angell Town estate. Initial plans for demolition emerged in 1967 (Simpson & Anning 1980:143). During the seventies a concerted campaign of squatting starting in 1973 culminated with an eventual victory and awarding of housing co-operative status to those who had squatted this road; this coincided with the beginning

of the radical Labour council in Lambeth (1980:149). Jill Simpson and Nick Anning who wrote the account cited here were among the squatters who took control of the road, in 1980 they wrote optimistically “Villa Road’s real victory was to prove that plans are not inviolable, and that people can affect and be directly involved in planning processes” (149).

5.6 Uprising, insurrection, riot

dem she wi bun dung di George

wi couda bun di lanlaad

wi bun dung di George

wi nevah bun di lanlaad

wen wi run riat all overah Brixtan

wen wi mash-up plenty police van

wen wi mash-up di wicked wan plan

wen wi mash-up di Swamp Eighty Wan

(Kwesi Johnson 2006:61)

The Brixton riot in 1981 did not come out of the blue, it was the consequence of a long era of racist policing and the social marginalisation of the black community. There are numerous apparent ‘flashpoints’ for the Brixton riots, two commonly mentioned events are the Deptford fire in which 13 young black people died in a fire at a party, this led to the above mentioned Black Peoples Day of Action (Szymanski 2011) organised by Darcus Howe and the Race Today Collective. There was a belief that the police failed to adequately investigate this tragedy which some felt had been the result of a fascist attack (Gilroy 2002:129-30). Gilroy identifies the main controversy resulting from this event which was the reporting of it and lack of attention paid to it due to the “kind of signifier that ‘black party’ had become” (Gilroy 2002:130). Swamp ’81 which took place 4 days before the riot began is perhaps the most commonly cited ‘cause’ of the Brixton riots. It was a large scale police operation - stop and search on an industrial scale - involving ten squads of police and 943 people stopped and searched (Gilroy 2002:131).

On the 10th April a young black man who had been stabbed was taken from the police by a crowd and ferried to the hospital as they feared that the police would not provide him with adequate care (Fryer 1984:398). Lord Scarman, who led the official inquiry into the events, viewed the incident differently arguing that the crowd of young people had misunderstood the intentions of the policeman who had apprehended the person with a stab wound (1982:45). However as with the Deptford fire whether the accusations against the police were correct

or not this event was surely symptomatic of the long history of racist policing which the community in Brixton knew all too well. Scarman also found that whilst there had been apparent efforts for police to reach out to ‘community leaders’ the stop and search exercise Swamp ’81 had continued into the evening of the 10th and he recognised that this had an inflammatory effect (1982:46).

April 11th began with a heavier than usual police presence in Brixton and after a crowd interrupted a stop and search being carried out by two officers involved in operation Swamp ’81 outside of a mini cab office on Atlantic Road a string of events which are recounted in detail by Scarman led to the beginning of violence (1982:48-67). Scarman’s explanations of the events rest ultimately on an identification of the black community as being somehow disorderly, somehow prone to violence due to a “set of social conditions which create a predisposition towards violent protest” (1982: 36). Paul Gilroy is very clear in his condemnation of the way in which Scarman racialises his analysis of the riot maintaining false notions of the “disorderly and criminally inclined black youth” (2002:138) and making the black community the criminal actors compared to the relatively passive upholders of the law – the police. Gilroy writes that in this way “Black transgressions of it [the law] become further evidence of their alien character” (Gilroy 2002:141).

In my research it was made repeatedly clear to me by people I came to know at the soup kitchen that the riot was not a ‘race riot’ but it had instead involved a cross section of a community who had become enraged by the police. Through the 1981 riot, and subsequent riots in 1985 and 1995 Brixton was represented as a place of black criminality and violence, that even if such action was in response to genuine disadvantage such inequality was not a sufficient justification. This racist discourse surrounding the black presence in Brixton has repeatedly been associated with Brixton’s reputation as a “decaying inner city area” (Scarman 1982:18) and to associate this decay with the area’s perceived blackness. In a pamphlet in 1982 called *We Want to Riot not to Work* the first section is called “Welcome to Brixton and its famous market” (Riot not to Work Collective 1982:3-5). They link the attempts to ‘regenerate’ the area directly to the riots, they write; “on the high street the gentrifiers have been hard at work welcoming visitors to Brixton ‘and its famous market’” (Riot not to Work Collective 1982:3).

5.7 Music, culture, subculture

If you walk out of Brixton underground station and walk over the pedestrian crossing, you will get to Tunstall Road. It is a pedestrian street with Morley’s department store on one corner and a Body Shop on the other, and if you look to your left you’ll see a large mural of David Bowie, there may even still be a few desiccated bouquets on the ground in front of it. It was painted in 2013 by an Australian street artist called

James Cochran (Brixton Buzz 2013) and is based on the cover art of Bowie's 1973 album *Aladdin Sane*. The same art work has been featured on the £B10 Brixton pound note that was launched in 2011. Bowie was born into one of Brixton's working class families in a neighbourhood which was still heavily marked by Luftwaffe bombing. The young David Bowie (David Jones) lived only 6 years in Brixton before his family moved from "eclectic Brixton" to Bromley (Morley 2016:85). Brixton has taken on Bowie as a 'son of Brixton' but his association with the neighbourhood was fleeting at best. Arguably the grey Bromley childhood he had was more significant than any kind of 'eclectic' Brixton childhood he didn't, Mary Finnigan has documented the importance of suburbia in a memoir of her friendship with the 22 year old Bowie in Beckenham (2016). But since the 19th century Brixton has been a neighbourhood which has found an easy association with music and popular culture, and particularly with the bawdy, subversive, inventive and otherwise subcultural edges of it. Though Bowie is a markedly white choice of icon of Brixton Musicality.



Figure 4: Brixton £10 (Source: Brixton Pound 2011)

As in other areas with a large Caribbean community Brixton was a place in London where Caribbean music was played, although the BBC refused to play it as "it was considered too raw and crude, their lyrics too obscene and too difficult to follow" (Hebdige 1987:92). By the late 1960s a thriving soundsystem culture had grown up in London in neighbourhoods like Brixton and Ladbroke Grove. The Ram Jam club in Brixton was a legendary venue to soundsystems such as Sir Coxsone's (Hebdige 1987:92; Gilroy 2002: 219). Rivalry between soundsystems led to the scene developing a reputation for violence during the 1970s that Gilroy cites as one of the reasons the scene became attractive to white youth during this time based on "common conceptions of masculinity and machismo" (Gilroy 2002: 220). Granville Arcade had a number of record stores in the 1970s

that sold Jamaican imports, and Brixton became one of the places in London where Caribbean and punk music came into contact with one another.

In the late seventies Punk and Reggae found affinity in their experience of being “rejected by society” (Hebdige 1987:96). Whilst in some ways the sounds bore divergent aesthetics they shared an experience of urban alienation and made a critique of Britain from that position, Hebdige identifies the similarity in song titles “*Anarchy in the UK* [and] *War in Babylon*” (Hebdige 1987:96). The Clash were the band who found most success in the forging of a connection between punk and reggae, starting with their 1977 song *Police and Thieves* originally recorded by Junior Murvin in 1976. Junior Murvin’s song had become an anthem in Jamaica and in Britain as police presence increased at carnival in Kingston and London, The Clash picked up on it following their involvement in the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival riots (Katz 2009: 249). The Clash’s version of *Police and Thieves*, with a rolling bass line and steady beat found the aesthetic overlap between reggae and punk, it opened up their 1979 album *London Calling*.

London Calling also includes the track *Guns of Brixton* with which the Clash depict the tension that existed in Brixton between police and the local community. Paul Simonon who sings *Guns of Brixton* grew up in Brixton and the song puts the Clash in a position not of empathy but sympathy with the situation in the neighbourhood. This challenges the notion in the Scarman report (1982) that it was the black community and not their white neighbours who cared strongly enough about the racism of the police to respond to violence with violence. The song opens with a rising and falling bassline which is surrounded by the thin edges of punk rhythm guitar grating against the sonorous bass all powered by a rhythm which strides through Brixton streets. It offers an image of total defiance and total unity:

*You can crush us
You can bruise us
But you’ll have to answer to
Oh, the guns of Brixton*

Simonon/The Clash (1979)

It’s no surprise that the Clash were one of the bands who performed alongside reggae bands in *Rock Against Racism* concerts (Hebdige 1987:96). For Paul Gilroy *RAR* found a powerful “oppositional language” in punk music that galvanised a movement:

which made an [...] overt plea for a non-sectarian transcendence of the various sub-cultural styles and identities and asserted a vision of the musics and the styles they had created in a pluralist coalition. (Gilroy 2002:157)

The dissonance and mutual admiration between punk and reggae and the coming together of these sounds in *RAR* concerts are an example of a movement which accommodates the complexity and messiness of urban culture within a cogent and purposeful campaign.

5.8 Which Brixton do you want to reclaim?

In February 2015 it was announced that the arches under the railway line that divides Atlantic Road and Brixton Station Road were to be evicted by their landlord Network Rail (McKie 2015). As mentioned above these are long running retail spaces which accommodated the first Marks and Spencer's in London. The strong reaction from the community resulted in a petition being signed by almost 30,000 people (change.org 2015). I was working in Brixton Village Market at the time, and this was an issue which was very quickly being discussed by both business owners and customers. The outrage over these plans grew and was picked up on by other campaigns within Brixton. On April 2nd a Facebook event appeared advertising a protest on April 25th that would be called "Reclaim Brixton". It aimed to bring together many of the local campaigns which had arisen, including *Save Brixton Arches*. They produced a list of some of these campaigns on their flyer:

Dozens of campaigns are taking place such is the scale of the problem of displacement taking place in Brixton.
SUPPORT THESE CAMPAIGNS! SAVE BRIXTON ARCHES / SAVE CRESSINGHAM
GARDENS / SAVE GUINNESS AST HOUSING TRUST / SAVE LAMBETH LIBRARIES
/SAVE DORCHESTER COURT EVICTIONS / FRIENDS OF STOCKWELL PARK / SAVE
CENTRAL HILL / SAVE MYATTS FIELD NORTH / SAVE KNIGHTS WALK / RECLAIM
LONDON & SHELL BUILDING / OUR BRIXTON / BRIXTON COMMUNITY UNITED /
LAMBETH UNITED HOUSING CO-OP / LAMBETH HOUSING ACTIVISTS / BRIXTON
SOUP KITCHEN / BRIXTON REC USER GROUP / FRIENDS OF STOCKWELL
SKATEPARK/ BRIXTON CYCLES & counting...

(Reclaim Brixton 2015)

Given the research interests of this project the title of the event felt particularly interesting. If Brixton was to be reclaimed, which Brixton was to be reclaimed, who for, and from whom? In the discourse surrounding gentrification both within academia and in popular culture the idea of return is commonly used (see Sophie Watson's discussion of nostalgia (Watson and Wells 2005:23 cited above in section 3.7). The notion of reclaim infers that there is an authentic core to the neighbourhood that contains a possible utopia. This could be compared to Benjamin's analysis of the arcades (see section 2.5) in which the past served to "master" the terrifying but also possibly emancipatory future (1999b:447). As with the nostalgic gloss which Benjamin observed in the arcades the notion of reclaiming Brixton promised that there was a utopian future contained in the neighbourhoods past. Looking backwards is easier than imagining a future of actual emancipation whereby the means of producing the neighbourhood are wrested from those who control the wealthy. In the first half of this chapter I have tried to represent the fractured nature of Brixton's past and the inequality and exploitation which runs through it – as with any history. Whilst there may be lessons to learn from the past there is no ready-made Brixton which can simply be reclaimed. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the

Reclaim Brixton protest via a detailed ethnographic account of attending it. This account demonstrates the fractured and messy nature of the coalition that formed the protest, and suggest that this reflects the necessarily fragmented nature of an urban neighbourhood. I will conclude with a discussion and critique of urban social movement theory and by relating the analysis made of the protest to the notions of alienation and authenticity which run through this thesis.

5.9 *That'll be good for your PhD*

“That’ll be good for your PhD” Mary said as she was prepping for lunch “Who really does own Brixton?”. Having witnessed the toing and froing over the upcoming protest from the distant perspective provided to me by social media, I was interested to see that the busy discussions that had been going on on Facebook were representative of the feeling on the ground. I had been on holiday for a couple of weeks, and the return to the city was painful. Where even the life of a privileged academic is lived within tight margins. I’m working with Mary during the day shift, I’m on a double, she is struggling with the weekend’s planned protests. Mary felt particularly troubled by the announcement that week that as part of the *Reclaim Brixton* protest the London Black Revolutionaries would march through Brixton Village Market in a protest they had named a Black Blockade. The suggestion that the market was somehow a racist space was too strong a claim for Mary, she appreciated that there were issues to do with race in Brixton but for Mary it was as if she was being called racist.

I could see how the militancy and forthrightness of the language of London Black Revs might make businesses in the market feel uncomfortable, but of course that was the point. I was impressed and excited at the time by the power and breadth of the anti-gentrification platform being built around the *Reclaim Brixton* campaign, and the radical anti-racism that the London Black Revolutionaries were bringing to the event made the politics seem even more interesting to me. The Brixton Buzz blog shared the press release for the Black Blockade:

We have chosen ‘the village’, not to guilt trip frequenters, or even overpriced gentrifiers. We have chosen the village because it is a symbolic symptom of racist and classist displacement, of irresponsibility. (Urban 2015)

In fact on the London Black Revs’ Facebook page the restaurant was singled out for particular opprobrium. A photograph of a breakfast menu was posted with a common highlighting the relative expense of the food on sale; the first line of the comment was “Is this really our community” (London Black Revs 2015). In 2013 I went to a protest against the opening of Champagne & Fromage, at the time it was hard to summon any particular empathy for the business owners in Brixton Village market, or at least it didn’t feel like it was

important to do so. In the process of working at the restaurant my personal political opinions have been complicated by relationships I have developed with Mary and other business owners in the market.

Mary felt upset at the suggestions that her business was part of the problem. Mary felt that her business had always endeavoured to be part of the community: from its origins as a supper club that cooked food purchased in the markets to her collaborations with other local businesses. She felt she had made an effort to employ people from the area. There were a handful of regular employees including Sally who had been working there since their late teens and were now at university. Using local suppliers was also a proud part of the business and throughout my time at the restaurant I was able to find my way well beyond the walls of the restaurant due to the other businesses that I would visit on various errands. The greengrocer on Popes Road, the cash and carry in Market Row, businesses that were suffering from rent hikes and a changing demographic were still getting business from Mary and other businesses in the market.

I don't believe that the negative effects that more established businesses and residents have suffered during the ongoing process of neighbourhood change can be countered by the activities of well intentioned business people. The soup kitchen was almost entirely funded by big businesses making donations and had very little support at all from the any state funding and whilst such philanthropy may be able to alleviate some symptomatic effects of capitalism's impact on a neighbourhood such as Brixton, I cannot see how it could result in actual improvement. So I am sympathetic with the stated aims of those involved in the *Reclaim Brixton* protest, and am personally particularly swayed by the arguments of the London Black Revs. However whilst having these political views I felt sympathy for the way Mary felt about what was happening. Mary had found a place to establish a small business and she had taken many opportunities to try to contribute to the community within which she was situated and the singling out of any particular person or business seemed to me at the time to dramatically miss the point. Through knowing Mary and coming to appreciate the determination she had to operate her business well, any simplistic binary understanding of the way that Brixton was changing was undermined. That evening I wrote in my notes: "I would be defensive of her in a conversation about the market, my scepticism and economic realism tarnished by the encounter with human effort and toil."

5.10 April 25th 2015

The police were eating in Brixton Village Market. In various restaurants in twos and threes they consulted over documents or just chatted while they sampled the diverse fare available to them. Outside Jalisco three policemen ate tacos together, one of them wore red epaulettes which surely signified some kind of seniority.

Apart from the fact that Champagne and Fromage had been boarded up the market was as busy as ever. There was little real indication that anybody there anticipated the huge protest which would flow through Brixton's streets and markets later that day. I was shattered, the night before I'd worked the worst shift I endured during my fieldwork, it had been an incredibly busy night and I had crumbled somewhat under the pressure. Finally able to escape to the loo, or to hide in the walk-in fridge for a while – I can't remember which – on the way I had had a frazzled conversation with someone working at Honest Burgers who had told me that Champagne and Fromage had received a call from the police suggesting they board up the shop for the day.

There were people everywhere with cameras and sound recorders, some may have been press but few seemed to carry the wealth and weight of equipment that signified mainstream media. Outlets such as Vice, Open Democracy, Novara had all variously taken an interest in gentrification in Brixton and social media was subsequently full with various reports on the day's events. I worried that some of them may be PhD students doing a better job than me at recording the day. Outside the tube station a small group of protesters waited with what I recorded in my notes as “*quite beautiful* black flags”. This was where the London Black Revolutionaries were meeting in preparation for their march through Brixton Village Market. Sensing that they weren't yet ready to depart I decide to walk past the arches. All along Atlantic Road and Brixton Station Road businesses had lowered their shutters and graffiti artists were decorating them with artwork protesting against the threatened evictions.

On the main drag an art performance was taking place, three women with signs hung around their necks: “Communities – Homes – Businesses” written separately on each. Behind them a young man wearing a balaclava holds a rope which is somehow attached to each woman, his sign says “Lambeth Council” on it. It creates a powerful set of images, and the photos do the rounds on social media for weeks. I am walking back towards the station and before I can see the gathering place for the Black Blockade I can hear it. The rolling bassline of Roots Manuva's *Witness* makes its way through the chattering crowds streaming from the station. Some of those arriving are there for the protest, but many look like the usual weekend crowd steeling themselves for the brunch queue.

I keep walking, I go down Coldharbour Lane, past a new trendy café that has iron grill shutters over its window, it turns out that this is by design, but in the context it seemed like they might have left them up out of fear. Outside Brixton Village Market I join a small march processing towards Windrush Square. A driver is out of his car furious with police for having his way obstructed. This group march behind the bombastic banners of the Class War party. Back inside the market I can hear the samba drums of the SOAS band that enliven protests all over London. They are accompanying the London Black Revolutionaries. I go and join

them before they pause outside Honest Burgers for a ‘mic check’ someone reads a poem and the crowd chant it back together amplifying his words.

We will fight for our community...

Being socially and ethnically cleansed...

In mourning and celebration ...

Memories are power...

It is our duty to fight for our freedom

It is our duty to win

We must love each other and support each other

We have nothing to lose but our chains.

The person reading this has an American accent, there is a clear and defiant quality to his voice and the voices that rise up in chorus. The last four lines are a quote from the Black Panther Assata Shakur (1987:52), lines which have become a feature of protests linked to the *Black Lives Matter* campaign. The crowd are a mixture of black, white, British, European, American, from Brixton and from elsewhere. It is certainly not a protest that is hostile to the middle classes; I recognise some of the crowd from other protests in London. Other chants start up as we walk through the market – “Whose Streets? Our Streets!”. This chant is one I’ve heard in protests all over London, but I don’t think I’ve ever heard it in a privately owned interior space. The claim that the so-called ‘avenues’ of Brixton Village Market could belong to anyone but the landlords felt profound and radical. It was an energetic but polite march through the market with impassioned cries echoing from the glass ceilings. It was pleasing to lock eyes with onlookers as diners and protestors scrutinised one another.

The notion of a black blockade is put in the context of an anti-colonial struggle, and a struggle to make visible a community under threat. Given that the market was listed in part for its significance to the Afro-Caribbean community there has been a clear failing on the part of the council. Given the historic significance of the market to the black community in Brixton the fact that anyone felt the idea of a protest called to highlight racism was controversial only draws attention to the lie that any such heritage was being protected. One man near me is asked by another protestor to keep the chants going because “you’re the only one they can hear”. In between the chants the man outside Jalisco could still be heard crying “Tacos! Tacos! Tacos!”. Most of the security guards guiding us through the market are black, they indicate some sympathy. One gives a thumbs up to a placard saying “fuck white supremacy”.

Once outside the market we walk along Coldharbour Lane and start moving towards the main protest. On the way we stop outside the Dogstar pub. Someone gives a speech that I can barely hear, recalling the riots

and the Atlantic Pub that used to be there. This crossroads had been a flashpoint in the violence between rioters and police in '81. "This is the heart of our community" he says by way of crescendo, and the crowd around him responded with a clamour of hoots and applause. The Samba band from SOAS play us into Windrush Square, slowly filing through the small streets behind the Ritzy cinema. When we arrive with a fanfare of drumming the assembled crowd already in the square cheer and whoop. There are two or three different PA systems playing music and speeches. Numerous others give smaller speeches to whoever will listen. Banners show prominent local campaigns, not just Save the Arches, but also the Ritzy living wage workers are out in force.

There were talks about Mumia Abu Jamal, the Philadelphia Black Panther in prison for murder. The organiser of Reclaim Brixton stood up and spoke along with somebody from the local Unite communities group. The woman speaking representing the organisers says "this is beyond politics – it isn't about party politics – this is about community". Windrush Square had been transformed into a huge expression of solidarity. The elision between politics and party politics in the claim that the event is 'beyond politics' highlights the lack of attention from mainstream media given to the hubbub of everyday politics that constitutes the way that people engage with their own neighbourhoods.

I headed towards the Arches, the other major point of assembly that day. On my way I pass an acquaintance who is very involved in radical political activism in London. He was on his way towards Windrush Square having left the arches. He had seen people holding hands and saying things like "stop social cleansing, protect our businesses" he said "I didn't agree enough to stay around". For my acquaintance this was a contradiction in terms.

There was a chain of people wrapped around the arches and chanting. I couldn't quite make out what they were saying. I think one of the words was gentrification which is seemingly very difficult to fit into a chant. The banners outside businesses on Atlantic Road included punning slogans such as "Budget Carpets: Floored by network rail". I loop round and back down Brixton Station Road, the other side of the arches. There are a lot of people in the chain, making a protective buffer for the businesses in the arches. I recognise a lot of the people on this side of the protest as business owners. There are interviews being filmed, photos being taken – I get pangs of inadequacy about my own research methods. After a while of ambling around another march sets off, the people who had been circling the arches now head towards Windrush Square. I join the shuffling crowd, this one much older than the London Black Revs. This felt like it was the easiest for people to get behind, it was more petition signing than police car tipping. There were campaign tee shirts and so on. The owner of A&C Continental, a business which would ultimately be one of the first to leave the arches, stood on a table to offer a bellow of encouragement as the crowd moved off. I cross to another more exciting

looking march heading in the opposite direction, the black revs and the samba band are having another go round.

Another friend is in the crowd, he is there for a friend's birthday – he doesn't seem to know all that much about Brixton, we talk about gentrification more generally. I see the sisters from the family who own and run Nour Cash and Carry walking past, looking curiously at the marchers, a woman slowly moving through the crowd in her car honks in solidarity, she smiles and waves. A builder in the scaffolding surrounding a building on Atlantic Road dances in time with the samba band. Back at Windrush Square there are various stalls and talks going on, a group of Rastafarians campaigning for reparations, the Brixton Society – a group of older largely white people who have long been the self-proclaimed documentarians of Brixton history.

The Cressingham Gardens and Guinness Trust housing campaigns were in full force at the protest. They had stalls selling tee shirts and inviting people to sign petitions and their banners and placards had been all over the protest. The local Unite Communities group who have been very involved in supporting and maintaining the housing struggles in Brixton were also out in force with the benefit of trade union funding for placard making.

I leave feeling tired and deflated. Maybe just because of the heat, but I couldn't persuade myself to enjoy the party atmosphere that had developed in Windrush Square. As I left there were little crowds of dancers around various mobile P.A. systems, there were families with children in pushchairs, people were bringing tins of beer out of off licenses and distributing them to friends from the flimsy blue carrier bags they had been transported in. I traipsed through the crowd and began my usual walk towards Camberwell along Coldharbour Lane. The protest had brought out the whole of Brixton on to the streets, it was representative, or it had felt like it was. But the multiple marches and protests trailing through and back in and over themselves revealed the profound problems in orchestrating such an event. Problems that run right to the very heart of my research project.

Which Brixton are you trying to reclaim? And on behalf of whom? Are you protecting business or are you protecting community? Are they the same or are they different? Who has a right to speak for 'the Brixton community'? On my walk back the great challenges of this project weighed heavily and I seemed only able to explore the margins. It was only a few days since I had done my first shift at the soup kitchen, and there I had been surprised how little anyone seemed to be aware of what was planned for the protest, and what it was about.

5.11 *Weaving through a fraying movement*

The protest was an impassioned challenge to the way that Brixton was changing, but it was unified, rather it was a complex set of intersecting statements. The differences of opinion within the protest were clear, and they felt as hard to overcome as the conflict with those outside of the protest. Mary was very animated by the campaign to save the businesses under the arches. She wrote a blog post to detail her anger at what was happening. But she felt singled out by other people who were participating in the Reclaim Brixton protest. Later in the afternoon after I had left the protest one of the estate agents Foxtons' windows were broken and in typical fashion the media were able to overlook the general good feeling of the protest and class a minor act of civil disobedience as hooliganism (Marshall & Mann 2015). I passed through the interweaving groups like a shuttle through a loom, a position which allowed me to see the messy fabric of the protest. This was not a mass movement, it was a mass expression of distress, but there was no unifying idea. In organising a protest called 'Reclaim Brixton' there was obviously an intention to bring together as broad a coalition of voices as possible. It showed Brixton at its most cohesive, an event a little like Brixton Splash or the Lambeth Country Fair, in the sense that everybody seemed to be there. But to demand an end to gentrification? To stop social housing being demolished and replaced by so called 'affordable' rents? To protect local businesses? Or to preserve the historic Caribbean-ness of the covered markets?

This research project began with a desire to comprehend the processes in Brixton in such a way that this thesis would make a valuable intervention in the planning processes which have created the situation that exists today. Reclaim Brixton made it clear that there was no shortage of incisive thought or passionate work in the contestation of the change the neighbourhood was undergoing. It was not clear how any of these campaigns were going to be able to exert any influence. It is notable that the performance I described above with the three women representing Brixton being tormented by Lambeth Council referred only to local government. Similarly the Brixton Arches campaign was vilifying Network Rail, the landlords, and the local council. But as the council officers I spoke with during my research would repeatedly point out to me – they were being asked to cut hundreds of millions of pounds by the government and many council officers feel they also had their hands tied. The politics of austerity have created a discourse by which cuts are necessary and suffering is necessary, an analysis described by Mark Fisher as *Capitalist Realism* (2009). This economic fatalism consistently undercuts urban activism like that at the Reclaim Brixton protest; it says that there are some aspects of neighbourhood change that we must accept, however unpleasant.

Johannes Novy and Claire Colomb have observed that urban social movements are often characterised by their “built in contradictions” (2013: 1831). In this sense Reclaim Brixton fits within the category, however it failed to have the influence that these movements have had elsewhere. Castells' term emerges from a notion

that rather than structural economic relations, urban social movements centre themselves on local issues relating to urban space (1983). Such movements make a virtue of course of heterogeneity, and as if there is anything to reclaim in Brixton it is its distinction from other similarly situated neighbourhoods, such as Clapham (the characterisation of a customer in the restaurant as a ‘Claphamite’ was the most dire warning). Harvey has commented on the necessity of capital not to crush such ‘character’:

And if capital is not to totally destroy the uniqueness that is the basis for the appropriation of monopoly rents (and there are many circumstances where it has done just that and been roundly condemned for so doing) then it must support a form of differentiation and allow of divergent and to some degree uncontrollable local cultural developments that can be antagonistic to its own smooth functioning. (108)
(Harvey 2002:108)

This statement chimes remarkably and ironically with the statement I heard given in a presentation by a Lambeth council officer – that Brixton must “retain its unique character and continue to grow”. Reclaim Brixton was a vigorous attack on the local government’s failure to prevent the panoply of injustices which were seen to have been inflicted on the neighbourhood, and that future injustices be prevented. It was also an event that brought to light the strength of community and the sheer passion that was felt by people that lived in Brixton for their neighbourhood. In other words it showed off Brixton at its unique best, and therefore uniquely vulnerable to those who recognize that ‘authentic’ character is always a means for the accrual of ‘authentic’ social capital. In the time since my research period ended the Restaurant I worked in and another called *Rosie’s* moved out of the area, the arches have been evicted, the small grain of the neighbourhood has become unsustainable whilst larger companies such as Soho House Group have brought in new restaurants and bars.

In Lefebvre’s *Right to the City* he fears that the playfulness of assembly will become subordinate to the aims of consumer society “The proposition of this [*Right to the City*] project is to gather together by subordinating to play” (1996:171). He relates playfulness to qualities of “movement, the unpredictable, the possible and encounters”, and much like the notion of *spielraum* discussed by de Certeau (2011) we are asked to imagine a place for inventive and radical social imagination. Harvey too hopes that this space of invention can be found in the ambiguity between the homogeneity of capital and the heterogeneity of urban culture which might provide impetus for oppositional movements (2002:109). In music by the Clash discussed above, they tried to accommodate dissonant sounds, there was no desire for refined synthesis, instead a playful too-much-ness was embraced and the breaking at the edges of the sound of *Guns of Brixton* made the song more, not less powerful.

Despite Reclaim Brixton’s display of difference and contradiction and its adequate provision of a space for encounter it did not develop into a powerful platform for campaign. Of the groups that were represented

some campaigns succeeded, but the vast spectacle of resistance that filled the streets of Brixton in April 2014 did not have a political impact to match its aesthetic one. Castells describes the community organization *Mission Coalition Organisation* (MCO) which was active in the predominantly Latino neighbourhood of the Mission in San Francisco between 1967 and 1973 (1983). The Mission is a neighbourhood which bore some resemblance to Brixton in that the community included a long established ethnic minority community and a middle class contingent alongside other groups which were interested in gaining a greater say in the planning processes that affected them. The MCO was a much more long standing organization than Reclaim Brixton and it carried out a more powerful and militant campaign of protest. However in Castells' analysis he makes two comments which relate valuably to this geographically and temporally distant context: "all self definition that might alienate other ethnic groups was to be excluded" and "The lack of confidence in the responsiveness of political institutions encourage political alienation" (1983:2009). Whilst I do not wish to pursue a detailed historical comparison we might valuably paraphrase these statements in a way which applies to Reclaim Brixton: at the risk of causing alienation the campaign did not make clear statements regarding the identities which constitute Brixton's community. A lack of faith in the local government caused by a clear lack of power (as evidenced by the arches' evictions) meant that a movement organized around the neighbourhood did not have a clear focus in terms of who they were asking to act.

Reclaim Brixton was a powerful expression of protest by the people that live there. It was the culmination of years of rumbling anger about the changing area. It was a broad but loose coalition with representation for numerous causes and community groups. Walking through the protest however there was not a clear place at which the threads gathered densely and forcefully, instead the interweaving movements and statements created a mass which simply disappeared when tugged at. The Save Cressingham Gardens campaign appeared to have briefly succeeded in preventing the demolition of the estate (Parkes 2015) however this was only been a temporary reprieve as plans to bulldoze the estate have once more been passed through cabinet (Slingsby 2016). In calling a protest framed by a neighbourhood it is inevitable, and vital that this action represent not only the diversity but the inevitably conflictual nature of the given area. The urban social movement requires a point of leverage for the activists. Under the post-2010 regime of austerity Lambeth Council have been stripped of budget and subsequently almost any complaint is defensible due to lack of funding. Even a chaotic coalition can put pressure onto a local government. Despite its claim to be a 'co-operative council' Labour controlled Lambeth council appear to have accepted the imperative to seek private funding to plug gaps left in the budget from cuts. As a consequence their influence is reduced, in the case of Network Rail and the arches, they cannot afford to challenge such an influential landholder in the area because other aspects of the neighbourhood plan require their co-operation.

5.12 Conclusion, hope for messy coalitions

Reclaim Brixton was a messy coalition of claims to speak for Brixton, it contained a complex of ‘authentic’ positions which created friction where they met. Mary felt she couldn’t engage with the London Black Revolutionaries, she felt excluded from their protest – a protest designed to contest what they identified as the exclusion of black people from the market. To me the march through the market was the most obviously purposeful and focussed part of the whole day. It was a collective and inclusive invective against a structural inequality. But the protest felt divided, the business owners at the arches were geographically and ideologically distant from the anti-capitalist Samba band from SOAS. The claims made to establish a right to speak for the various campaigns produced a distancing effect, they alienated one campaign from another, it made the idea that the protest was speaking for ‘Brixton’ difficult to believe. When Lefebvre (1996) writes hopefully about playful assembly he does not seem to appreciate the discord that can arise between the necessary fragments of an urban social movement. But perhaps there is something about the contemporary governing of the city which stifles the playfulness which could allow social dissonance to still produce a purposeful sound.

The first half of this chapter attempted to represent as fragments the heterogeneous Brixton of the mind. There are multiple further elements that could have been added to this synchronic and chaotic history of the neighbourhood. In making such a representation this chapter worked to set up a context for the protest which would provoke the response ‘which Brixton?’ to the assertion ‘Reclaim Brixton!’. In his conclusion to *Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* Paul Gilroy makes a subtle reading of urban social movements that suggest that radical politics emerges from “rootedness” (2002:337) that notions of tradition can be the basis for communities under threat to build solidarity. Importantly he also states that tradition should be viewed synchronically with the ties that bind a political coalition being a tradition made “of present rather than past conditions” (2002:339). It is also important to recognise that he incorporates riot into the kind of social movement he is discussing, allowing the chaotic and destructive to be read as a political action, their complex and unspoken qualities giving an ability to negotiate the problem of “speaking to a single community” (2002:335). However, Reclaim Brixton did not become a basis for further action, rather it was a moment that melted away in the face of a political climate which staunchly claimed that there was no other option. It was a loose and joyful, if also conflictual, event – but it was quashed before it had a chance to breathe.

That Gilroy chose to use the example of the riot to illustrate the political power of urban social movements is important. In the form of the riot there is a different form of political inter-subjectivity in which the individual has time only to react to the world around them, solidarity becomes a matter of proximity and care not claim and counterclaim. The Brixton Riot in ’81 was violently represented as an essential consequence of race by the media, the police and by Lord Scarman (1982). In doing so the un-alienated expression of anger

at social prejudice becomes transformed into an inevitable and passive product of cultural identity. In the contemporary political climate gentrification has come to be regarded as a necessary evil, particularly in the face of the council's apparent powerlessness to resist it. The defeatist politics of 'there is no alternative' (Fisher 2009) continue to be deployed to alienate protestors from the mechanics of local politics, and perform a double alienation by setting up the local council to be similarly isolated from the means for social change. Gilroy's deployment of the idea of tradition recalls Buck-Morss' description discussed in chapter 2 of Benjamin's analysis of the role of utopian images of the future concealed as dream-images of the past leaving "the collective not even aware that it is dreaming" (Buck-Morss 1991:118). I would like to suggest that in the notion of 'reclaiming' there is an appeal to tradition which conceals the actually vital dream, that of an unalienated collective solidarity where the identity politics are critiqued and recognised in the hope of surpassing them and not tragically creating distance which only serves to fritter away a glimpse of a truly messy and viable political coalition.

6. Market at the Heart of the Community

This chapter will describe Brixton Village Market, the covered market which housed the restaurant where I worked during my fieldwork and the centre of many debates surrounding the transformation of Brixton. The redevelopment of the market will occupy the first half of the chapter with accounts of the market's transformation interspersed with a longer historical perspective on the market. In line with the previous chapter the narrative is historically situated and fragmented. Archival research, interview material and ethnographic observations come together to create a patchwork image of the market which captures some of its messiness. In section 6.5 the actual material messiness of the market brings the description of the way the market has changed to its conclusion, where I argue that the market must be seen as a commercial space, and that narratives of community and authenticity flatter to deceive the realities of this space. Beginning in section 6.8 the chapter concludes with some ethnographic detail of how it was to work in the market. Building on the argument that the market must be seen as a commercial space with a detailed participant-observer depiction of the labour involved in making Brixton Village Market what it is. Ultimately this chapter will argue that attempts to 'save' Brixton Village Market only laid the groundwork for the continued commercial profitability of it. The claims to authenticity made regarding the heritage or independence or cultural capital of the businesses and the market itself have only served to gloss over the continuing alienation produced not only for those who work in the market, but many of the business owners and customers. By setting an account of the attempts to redevelop the market, which I do not believe were universally cynical, against an account of the experience of working in it - the dialectical relationship between claims to authenticity and alienation can be clearly observed.

6.1 *Friends of Brixton Market*

In April 2008 an article appeared in the *South London Press* titled "Uproar at secret plans for market". It was written in response to a decision by the Twentieth Century Society to write to English Heritage with the aim of establishing listed status for the covered markets of Brixton (South London Press 2008). Arguably this was the beginning of the process that led to the market becoming iconic of Brixton's 'gentrification'. This initial attempt to list the market appears not to have been successful, however when specific plans surfaced in December 2008 (Urban75 2008) this was an obvious tactic to return to. English Heritage listing is one of the few mechanics that allow a site to become somewhat insulated from the property market.

Friends of Brixton Market was started in the same year. I interviewed two of their founding members, Mark and Paul, both of whom would go on to have a central role in the campaign to save the market that went on through 2009. The initial inquiry with the help of Twentieth Century Society was made by Stephen, who I was

informed by a number of people would not be interested in speaking to a researcher. The initial intention was that Friends of Brixton Market would work to support the traders and the results seem to have been limited to the sale of tote bags, but according to Paul when “LAP (London & Associated Properties) did their whole thing with knocking it down we went into campaign mode”. Paul said when he found out about Stephen’s pre-existing efforts to get the market listed he realised it was what the Friends of Brixton Market also needed to do.

Paul had started Friends of Brixton Market when he returned to Brixton following a career as a journalist in another country. His parents were denizens of “one of the lost tribes of posh people [...] they were socialists, hence being in Brixton in the 1970s.” He told me that one night he found himself woken by a dream of Granville Arcade, now Brixton Village Market, with a sign before it announcing its closure saying “Asda coming soon”. From this point, as he described it, he knew he had to return home. And when he did he found the covered markets under threat and decided to lead a campaign to save the market, Friends of Brixton Market. “I had a fantastic and amazing selection of people”. Mark’s image of the founding of Friends of Brixton Market did not have quite the same messianic flair to it “In many ways it was Paul’s little group of friends, [...] he managed to get one or two who weren’t part of his little bunch along too. I was one of those people.”

Mark told me that the market had been managed in a state of “benign neglect” for some years before LAP acquired it in September 2006 (LAP 2006). Following that acquisition LAP presumably began to develop the plans for redevelopment that were publicised by Friends of Brixton Market in late 2008. When my research began the management of the market had been taken over by a management company who I made unsuccessful efforts to speak to. When I moved to London and lived on Coldharbour Lane in September 2008 Brixton Village Market certainly fitted the description of benign neglect, many of the shops were empty and there were leaks that left puddles in the avenues. A state that I would now view as evidence of a rent gap (Smith 1979). Mark suggested that this neglect led to an insecurity for the tenants “people taking on problematic tenures without questioning things, without having any legal advice, people don’t know whether they have a right to be trading where they’re trading”.

Mark took the view that the landlords were taking advantage of the “inherent chaos” of the market in order that it might destroy itself in advance of being turned into a “monolith”. Mark, Paul, Stephen and many other people from Brixton wanted to make sure that this wasn’t allowed to happen. Initially the plans for Brixton Village Market were made with the support of the council. The desire was to build ten storeys on top of the market, preserving some of the existing glazed arcade and footprint of the market.



Figure 5: Plans for Brixton Village Market made in 2009 by architects Stanford Eatwell (Source: Brixton Buzz 2013)

The quite astonishingly ugly plans present a curious alternate path for Brixton, it is hard to imagine that this site could have heralded the bourgeois foodie credibility that Brixton Village Market has since welcomed to the neighbourhood. However the council eventually changed their mind and swung behind the work to have the market protected by an English Heritage Listing, Mark called this moment “the realisation that they were screwing up”.

Lambeth Council announced their turn around via a press release on March 13th 2009. The Press release quoted Councillor Rachel Heywood as saying

Brixton Market is an iconic symbol of Lambeth’s history and Granville Arcade (also known as Brixton Village) is the jewel in the market’s crown. It has a great social, historic, and cultural significance – particularly for the Windrush generation and the African Caribbean community. The shops and businesses trading from the arcade today represent Lambeth’s diverse communities and are a living example of the integration of new communities into society through economic and social opportunities. The unique cultural significance of Granville Arcade deserves to be recognised and its future preserved for future generations.

(Lambeth News 2009)

This chimes with Mark’s view that the council feared being perceived as “cultural vandals” and that they should be seen to support “multi-cultural London”. Three days later the landlord announced that they were not going to submit a planning application, the South London Press reported the chief executive as attributing this not

to any of the listing discussion but that “the decision has been taken in light of the dramatic downturn in the residential sales market” (South London Press 2009). It is interesting to notice the discrepancy here. Though perhaps the potential for fuss and the council’s removal of support represented a significant enough economic obstacle for the landlord, It was not until the following year that the market was finally formally listed by English Heritage.

The listing was made on 31 March 2010. This essentially secured the future of the market and ensured that the landlord would not be able to demolish the building as they had planned. Notably the market was not listed solely for its architectural merit, in fact it was rejected several times due to a lack thereof. In the eventual listing the architecture of Brixton Village is described minimally “Pitched glazed roofs carried on steel trusses [...] shop fronts retain original elements but they are generally much altered” (Historic England 2010). More importantly in the listing is the market’s “historic interest” the component that appears to have finally been persuasive, the argument for this can be seen being made by Rachel Heywood in the Lambeth council press release above.

Historic interest: the well-known Brixton Market complex formed the commercial and social heart of the extensive Afro-Caribbean community that settled in Brixton after WWII. The successful adoption of the markets is the clearest architectural manifestation of the major wave of immigration that had such an important impact on the cultural and social landscape of post-war Britain, and is thus a site with considerable historical resonance. (Historic England 2010)

This raises a crucial question for this thesis – where now can that historic interest be found? To what extent is it being preserved, and what does this actually mean?

The very idea of listing a building for its significance to a community is problematic, and cuts to the heart of the divided notion of authenticity put forward in chapter 2. To state that a market is culturally significant, and that this is a reason for it not to be demolished, alienates the messy idea of community from its reality and creates an alienated claim to authenticity which can be appended to a building and circulated in policy documents. What it does not do is explain how any such significance can actually be preserved. It is arguable that the market continued to play the central role in the neighbourhood which was attributed to it, it had certainly been allowed to become run down. But the listing made no demands over how the market should be managed or how such an ethereal concept could be preserved. Ultimately it was a label that simply meant the building could not be demolished, as such the market had to be adapted into a form that would suit the commercial requirements of the property holders.

6.2 Granville Arcade

Brixton in the early twentieth century was a successful suburban retail destination, its street markets were busy and well known (section 5.3). In 1927 Andrews and Peascod Architects had a planning application approved to build the arcade now known as Market Row that runs between Electric Lane and Atlantic Road (LCC 1926-1958). In March 1937 a diagram made of the market as part of a fire safety audit by the London County Council (LCC 1926-1958) reveals a covered market that was home to greengrocers, butchers, haberdashers, and other clothes shops. A year before that, in 1936, Mary Benedetta published her description of London's Street Markets, she recorded Brixton's crowded shopping streets packed with shoppers looking for good prices (Benedetta 1936).

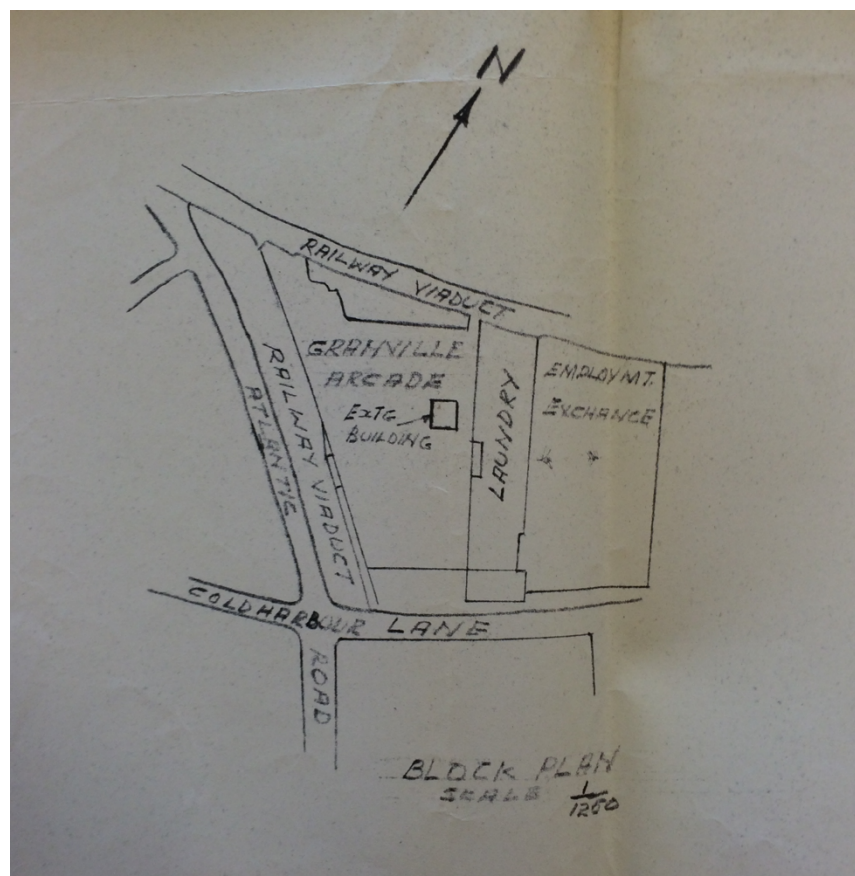


Figure 6: Drawing from 1936 Planning Application showing the arcade in relation to Carlton Club. (Source: LCC 1926-1958)

It was in exactly this context that Philip Granville Grossman decided to employ Alfred and Vincent Burr to draw up designs for another covered market in Brixton. This one would be built on the site of the old Carlton Club (see figure 6). The following year in *The Times* an advertisement announced “[o]pportunity for [p]rogressive [s]hopkeepers [...] 100 lock up shops with store-rooms above situated in Brixton’s shopping centre”. The

contact was listed as Grossville Estates (Times 1937:28). Brixton was seen as an opportunity for entrepreneurial shopkeepers, its successful shopping streets, department stores and arcades made it a prime neighbourhood for retail property development. Amusingly, Philip Granville-Grossman was later admonished in the courts for attempting to register himself as an architect, he plead guilty and said that “he had acted out of pure vanity” (The Times 1943). It is tempting to imagine the kind of gossip and intrigue that this may have caused amongst Brixtonites with an eye for the news.

Granville Arcade seems not to have been an immediate success, and in May 1938 an application was made to close off some of the market by building gates because the unoccupied shops created a “bare appearance” that had a negative impact on trade. It seems that Granville Arcade was a speculative development that failed to pay off. It did not reach its reserve price in an auction in 1951 (The Times 1951:6). It appears to have been eventually taken on by a company called Selected Land and Property in 1956 (The Times 1956:11). Much like current developments (e.g. Pop Brixton) Granville Arcade, now Brixton Village Market was subject to the risk involved in such property investments. The change of hands that appears to have happened during the 1950s coincides with the influx of Afro-Caribbean migrants into London (section 5.4). In the English Heritage listing it is noted that it was at this time that Brixton’s reputation as “the pre-eminent district of Afro-Caribbean settlement and culture in both the capital and country” (Historic England 2010) emerged. The listing quotes a “white stallholder in the 1950s” as calling the Afro-Caribbean community’s presence as “a shot in the arm for local trade” (Historic England 2010).

In 1961 Brixton Village Market appears in a Pathe short called *Caribbean Market*: “If you’re regretting the fact that your housekeeping allowance won’t stretch to a ticket on the next plane Trinidad bound, take a trip to London’s South West nine” (Pathe 1961). The valuable presence of these new shoppers, seeking products not widely available in London at the time led to what English Heritage calls “the successful adoption of the markets is the clearest architectural manifestation of the major wave of immigration” (Historic England 2010). The yams and saltfish are still in evidence, but in comparison to the scenes recorded in *Caribbean Market* (Pathe 1961) the Afro-Caribbean community are not. The listing seems to make a claim about the adoption and permanent adaption of the architecture of the market to the needs of the new migrant community. However on a busy Sunday morning you are more likely to see avocado on toast being brought out to a tableful of young white students recovering from hangovers than you are any echo of the market’s significance to the Afro-Caribbean community. This question of community will be central to the following section, an account of the project led by the agency *Spacemakers* which marked the dramatic transformation of Brixton Village Market. In the process of transformation that the market underwent we can observe the challenges of building a community into a building. Where the listing hoped to preserve cultural importance, *Spacemakers* hoped to build a vibrant space for the community. Their failure was not down to a lack of good intentions, though it will be shown that the

process was full of missteps, most importantly however it shows that an authentic community politics cannot easily be accommodated within a commercial space. What remains of the good intentions are alienating and alienated claims to authenticity which rest on symbolic credentials rather than political practice.

6.3 *Spacemakers*

I told Paul who else I had interviewed: Mark, who he ran *Friends of Brixton Market* with and Malcolm, who had been a co-founder of *Spacemakers*: “Not that anyone’s lying ... it’s like Rashomon ... different perspectives on the same thing”. This was a very diplomatic way of describing the various disagreements that occurred surrounding the process of transforming Brixton Village Market from its initial state of benign neglect into London’s premier foodie destination. Paul was not dogmatic, he did not take a clear view on what Brixton was or how it should be, but he appeared proud of the various roles that he had within the community. Paul who had dabbled in local politics was the arch politician flitting between acknowledgement of the issues of social inequality and of the enterprise of the independent businesses that have arguably highlighted the social change occurring in Brixton. “Brixton’s always changing ... why have a frozen image of Brixton?”. However Malcolm and Mark took far more partisan views on the process, and had ultimately come to reflect critically on their own involvement.

Mark described the background to *Spacemakers*: “The listing decision came through and the landlords were then left not knowing what to do with it and it sat there for a year in the same sort of state”. This was the year following the recession, 2009, and the effects were weighing heavily on the high street. In April 2009 the secretary of state for communities and local government, Hazel Blears, had announced a scheme to provide small amounts of money to facilitate the creative use of empty shop space (Booth 2009). At the time *Spacemakers* was a regular meeting of people discussing issues to do with urban place and considering the kind of actions they might get involved in, their web presence meant that when people started googling empty shops they found this group. A council officer at Lambeth had been tasked by his new boss at the regeneration team to look into empty shops and art projects, he happened to have a meeting immediately after with LAP and other council officers, consequently the council decided to make an introduction. Malcolm told me that this was the way that *Spacemakers* took on LAP as a client, to help them manage the market in a way that would make it a more successful space.

Lambeth appear to have been excited about the fact they had brought together *Spacemakers* with LAP and in Malcolm’s account of the process he felt that Lambeth had been over eager in their announcement of the partnership, to the detriment of the project - “By the time we had actually got time to start talking to people in

Brixton there had already been about 6 weeks of rumours going around about this outside agency that was being brought in". Mark felt that Spacemakers had rushed into the project, "they didn't do any sort of an analysis of the social context" Mark told me that they spoke to a small number of locals, one in particular who they took "as sort of the figure of authentic Brixton". Importantly, Malcolm agreed with Mark that this had been a shortcoming "the biggest thing that I would do differently again [...] is to spend 6 months on the ground talking to people, learning more about the area". However, as it was, the process went ahead with what both Malcolm and Mark agree was, an inadequate amount of work to understand how this would fit within the existing community. "As I say, I'd moved to London less than two years earlier" Malcolm told me, and interjecting upon himself almost perhaps seeking justification for his position "I did know Brixton a little bit because one of my friends from university had moved there [...] I had a sense of it as a special place".

They made a formal agreement with LAP in October 2009 and the "space exploration" evening happened in the first week of November, this invited anyone interested in taking up one of the shops to look at what was available before making a bid. These were people initially looking to participate in a scheme that would give them three months free rent, this was ultimately extended by a further three months. Most of the empty spaces were on the side furthest away from the town centre, which corresponds remarkably with the request to close off part of the market in 1938. Malcolm told me that the deputy market manager had never seen fewer than fifteen units sitting empty in the ten years he had worked there. There then remained a substantial amount of work to be done to get customers into the market again.

Malcolm told me there were a hundred applications which were whittled down to thirty: "people were really excited and then it began to dawn on them the responsibility of having a space in this cold half empty market". Once the spaces had been matched up with new businesses a cold winter followed. During which new businesses hurried to open up, one shop whose co-owner I interviewed told me that they built the whole shop in the space of a week working late into the night every night. The market struggled initially to draw a crowd, and Mark was critical of the fact that they chose to begin the project in December rather than preparing better and opening in Easter. Mark was also critical of the process as a whole, feeling that the decisions were more aesthetic than they were socially grounded, what he called a "creativistic discourse, hey we'll open it up and a thousand flowers will bloom". More seriously he told me that he had been disappointed to discover that a south London social enterprise that offered up retail spaces to young people had had their proposal for a space rejected, he told me that when he phoned the charity they said, laughing at the plain speech of their response, "can I just stop you there, we applied, we were at that evening, we applied, and we were rejected, and the spacemakers are an elitist little clique". After a late intervention from Mark, via a discussion with the art history graduate daughter of one of the landlords, he arranged a meeting ("Spacemakers were grinding their teeth the whole time") between the council, Spacemakers and this charity, which resulted in them taking a space. Even

though it didn't go well, and did not find the market a hospitable space they were still provided a photo opportunity for a council officer "I should have been in that photo, I mean it shouldn't have been, it was just stupid. Basically my view is from that time on economics is basically what it's been."

I'm sick of the people down my road going to me, I think we all owe Mark ten percent of the increase of our house prices, and me sort of going hububuh yeah – oh no – and going to dinner parties or whatever in the neighbourhood where people go oh well cities always changing that's the nature of it. If you say to them what is the nature of the change and can we not try to influence the nature of the change and can't it be shared out more equitably and they go - you're a Stalinist

Mark's language here illustrates a deep discomfort at the profitable consequences of the transformation of the market, and the role that he is given in it by his neighbours. He comes face to face with alienation in the quote above, his labour, and the labour of the community group that he was instrumental in organising are revealed to have had their means of production well and truly confiscated, as far as Mark's neighbours are concerned the whole project was only ever going to benefit them. The agonising dissonance for Mark is that as a homeowner his neighbours see him as complicit in a process which has alienated him from the means of production held by the Friends of Brixton Market.

Ultimately Mark and Malcolm were as uneasy as each other about their involvement in Brixton Market's transformation. They shared the view that one of the key failings of the project was the lack of proper community engagement in the initial phase of inviting businesses into the market. They also share a sense of profound alienation from the market where they were once so deeply involved. Paul too, though in a slightly different register, was finding that his efforts had meant that he could now not afford to start the business that he wanted to in Brixton, he told me he had priced himself out. Malcolm's final moments with Brixton involved a direct conflict with Mark, a local newspaper ran a front page story about the plans to increase the rents in the market.

The actual thing that brought me to the point that I was really exhausted with three days before that article came out I happened to bump into Mark ... Mark was kind of my primary contact at friends of Brixton market and I met a lot with him and had some really long conversations, including some quite heart to heart conversations, and that night he kind of said to me um, there's a journalist going to do an article for the Lambeth Free Press, will you talk to her, will you give her a quote? And I said yes I will because I knew what I would say and I was prepared to say it to try to put something on the record that would um help Friends of Brixton Market in a way that was kind of diplomatic. I felt like there was stuff that I could say that would be constructive from Spacemakers. I didn't hear anything from the journalist then on Friday the article came out and Mark went on urban 75 (a local messageboard) and said its time for

Spacemakers to put up or shut up, basically saying they need to speak out against LAP or they need to leave, and I was really very upset about that because I felt like I had played it very straight. I hadn't always got things right [...] to be fair the conversation then went on in Urban 75 and lots of people told Mark that he was being stupid and he himself backed down and said the focus shouldn't be on Spacemakers.

I interviewed Malcolm via Skype, and it was plain by his facial expressions that he felt some real anguish over this episode. He seemed to have felt somewhat persecuted, his acknowledgement that Spacemakers had not sufficiently worked to build links with the existing community perhaps being played out in a sense of being an outsider. Whatever the pros and cons of the various positions taken, which form the complex, as Paul said, Rashomon-like, story of the transformation of Brixton Village Market, it is evident that it was at times grueling emotionally and physically. It seems hardly surprising that Malcolm found himself feeling burned out. The politics of neighbourhood change are not the cool and anonymous technical processes of politics – but bitter, unpleasant, and physically exhausting. Mark told me

I don't go down there anymore because I just find the space to be just a bit claustrophobic now. I think the claustrophobia is based on self consciousness based on the mobilization of the symbols of distinction [...] you walk around with these books being put into you to do with you know intriguing authentic questions being kind of forced at you. You just think – woah – I just want something a bit more neutral

Observing the processes of local politics in Brixton from a close and personal scale of observation it has become hard to draw clear lines between the protagonists. Undoubtedly *Spacemakers* were invited into the project to increase the rent revenue of the market whose value as a site to be physically redeveloped had been effectively made null and void by being listed. In their annual report in 2010 LAP explicitly linked an 8% rise in revenue to their employment of *Spacemakers* (2010:14). However I think to a certain degree *Spacemakers* must also be seen as having been exploited. Malcolm, it appeared to me, was a thoughtful and passionate activist when it came to issues of public space and urban change. With the benefit of hindsight he believes that had the labour of those who were involved in transforming been somehow transformed into a change in governance – as it would have done if someone had invested cash into the project, then it could have had far better results. A notion that serves as an effective way to post rationalize the alienating experience of having one's labour exploited. Mark and Paul had their own share of optimistic ideas for the future of the market, Mark imagined a “teenage utopia” like Camden market and Paul told me that he was “looking for a way in which I could help change things for the better”. The distance they all seemed to feel from the market seems an adequate response to being involved in a project that once it hit the brick wall of capitalism lost all any of its utopian gloss.

6.4 *An entrepreneurial dreamland*

The initial months and even years of the Brixton Village Market project were a time of experimentation and adventure for many of the businesses involved. John, who started a business with his partner in the first phase of Spacemakers' project was keen to emphasise that Spacemakers were "an interesting group of people". He wanted me to understand that even if the consequences of the market's transformation had been to create a more typically commercial retail space there was an initial project participated in by the businesses as well as the agency to "explore what a market means and what can be done with a market". John and Sue's business had emphasised localness and alternate business models. For them the initial free three months of rent had presented an opportunity to explore these alternatives: "it was an experiment – nobody necessarily thought we came up with something we'd be doing in a couple of years". John wanted me to understand that the market was challenging expected notions of commerce and development; "the whole thing was very home spun – it was uncommercial".

When they were given the keys to their new space at the beginning of November 2009 they immediately launched into work. John was clearly – and justifiably – proud of the intense effort they put in to get their business working:

We ripped it apart. We pulled out what was there, which was the skanky remains of a little Columbian takeaway – and it was skanky. Dead roaches. Destroyed a load of pallets made some funky pallet shelving and we gave it a lick of paint in this trendy Farrow and Ball grey. We happened to have some lying around in the basement because we'd used it to paint our stairs, and you know we worked really hard on producing stuff, often over night. We were given the keys something like very early December 2009, on the 17th of December we opened

Eventually the business became a restaurant, John had a background in cheffing, it had started mainly selling preserves. In time they changed again and became a homeware store. It was clear that John and Sue had made the most of opportunities as they emerged. Referring to the start of their restaurant some months after they opened he put it in clear economic terms "we recognized a gap".

The initial period of the market's rejuvenation was a flurry of excitement according to John "they used to have fire-eaters and trapeze artists and surrealist comedy all sorts going on just outside the door". John's account seemed to contain both an intention to establish their authentic credentials as progressive business people, attempting to challenge and change existing models of capitalism and a more hard-nosed emphasis on honest hard work. This was not an uncommon hangover from the initial phase of the market's transformation. There was a tension between the fresh and liberated experience of being able to start a business with no rent to pay and space to experiment and pride in the fact that John and Sue were one of the businesses to still be going strong.

Mary, who was my boss at the restaurant, began her business with a business partner in 2011. She'd arrived in London with a friend from university in 2007 and they'd both moved to Brixton because it appealed to them because of its nightlife. They had a regular fitness class on Monday evenings and afterwards they would go to Nour Cash and Carry to buy veg and go home to cook salads. As these became more elaborate and the supper club began to become a thing in London, the phenomenon of individuals charging for meals hosted in their own homes, they decided to open up one of their kitchens to paying guests. Using social media, particularly the still at that time relatively nascent Twitter, they managed to build a customer base and ran successfully until deciding to venture into street food at events. When they saw the advert offering the space in Brixton Village Market they decided to take the opportunity. They'd run a pop-up at John and Sue's place the year before and they had been customers of other of the new businesses in the market.

Mary told me that they settled in very quickly in terms of the other traders "we were very welcome" she said, and compared to later businesses "who've come in since, who haven't started their business in Brixton or don't live in Brixton so it was very easy to become part of the community". Mary described the early days as difficult to establish themselves. "It took a while, a lot of experimentation". She felt like the criticism was not coming from what she called the "traditional traders" in the market, they were largely positive about the increase in footfall. One in particular, a fishmonger called Arthur "took us under his wing ... he was kind of the mouthpiece for traditional traders and he blamed a lot of it – he said – it's not you guys coming in it's the fact that they got rid of the car park". For Mary it was obviously heartening that the pre-existing business community was welcoming of her and the fact that she had relationships with some of the businesses that had come before the new influx provided a kind of respectability. Mary was once enthused about being a new business, she called the market an "incubator of food business start ups" and a business that could relate to what came before.

From informal discussions with colleagues at the restaurant it was clear that the market had been a fun place to work in the early days. Perhaps in part because the new businesses were still enthused. One of the very occasional chefs when I was working there had started her entire cooking career after working at the restaurant; she told me that after shops closed the staff from all the different businesses would drink together and hang out. This had been how she had met her long-term partner. When old employees came in they often commented on the fact that the market didn't seem as fun as it once had been. One evening shift in the summer some of the old staff had been drinking at another restaurant whose owner was an old friend; one of them had just come back from a year of travelling. I was working with Chloe and Andre both of whom had been working at the restaurant since they were in their mid-teens. The returning waitress barreled in during a shift quite drunk and came back into the kitchen and chatted loudly and made jokes even though customers could

hear. Having known her for a while, Chloe and Andre who were mainly at the receiving end of this looked awkward – she was disrupting the service but they didn’t want to seem like spoilsports yet she was making our jobs all a little more difficult to do. She seemed to have expected to find a more relaxed and casual working environment – but instead, whilst they are by no means austere, Chloe and Andre are quite professional and were clearly not behaving in the way that the returning waitress was accustomed to. When she left they both looked completely relieved.

From interviews and other ethnographic material it is quite clear that the first few years of the ‘rejuvenated’ market are looked back on as the halcyon days. A time in which there was a good balance between business and community; the staff who used to work at the restaurant had enough energy and good spirit at the end of the shift that they felt able to socialize with other businesses. I don’t ever remember finishing a shift wanting to do anything except return home. This was also likely exacerbated by the longer opening hours that had been established over the years, leading to the market being open every evening except Monday and Sunday. Initially rents were lower, even free for the initial three months, and the opening hours were limited, the businesses were still finding their feet; this seems to have contributed to an atmosphere that many now miss. Malcolm told me that LAP “could never grasp what it was that spacemakers could do that they couldn’t do, they were really mystified by why something was working”. Malcolm put it down to the culture that developed with many people who lived in the area getting involved. “After we left the newer tenants that had come in did try to keep up the events, perhaps inevitably that then begins to ebb away”. Malcolm was suggesting that as Spacemakers left the ‘decline’ of the market towards brute commercialism began. He resented that the landlord had not given him the opportunity to explore “how people do things when neither money nor state power are being used to shortcut the need for people to want to do things”. For Mary and John it seems like this had continued beyond the presence of Spacemakers but that it was fading. Particularly Mary who contrasted the old system – one of mutual community co-operation and friendliness, with a new one, in which the businesses – “the new system just seems to be people cashing in on that image of Brixton”. The exciting world of new businesses has faded in the market and been replaced by a more businesslike and less optimistic atmosphere.

6.5 Infrastructure

Malcolm seems to have hoped that the market might somehow have become a space outside of brute commerce, Mark was clear that he would have preferred a market that supported the entrepreneurial efforts of local young people. In contrast, Ian and Mary, whilst recognizing an era which they preferred, took a businesslike view to the changing nature of the market and acknowledge the requirement of a business person to adapt to the times. Mary summed this up when she said “we were aware of trying to create a place which

was welcoming to everybody, definitely, but we had to pay the rent”. Brixton village market has never been a co-operative dreamland, it was built speculatively and it continues to evolve and change in relation to the changing opportunities to make money in the neighbourhood. Whilst culturally the market has had significance to different Brixton communities since its inception, as any retail space does, ultimately it is a market, and is built to provide a low-friction space for commodities to flow through. So the notion that the market has heritage that should be protected by being listed is a curious one. A covered market is a set of empty signifiers available for hire, whilst it has become variously iconic of the neighbourhood of Brixton, such association only exists in its use, not in its bricks.

The tiny kitchen at the restaurant works at full capacity, it exploits every opportunity for the production of value that is provided by the small space. There are usually two staff, three if the shift is set to be busy. We brush up against each other while food is prepared, dishes are washed, drinks are made, orders are taken. This is the case for most of the businesses who are improbably compressing restaurants into spaces designed for grocers or fabric shops. When table five had four covers on it, the front of house staff had to shuffle behind their backs to get out of the kitchen. The most successful businesses had gradually occupied spaces outside of other businesses that did not open in the evenings, at capacity there were customers in every available position. In 2015 a few months into my time at the restaurant we closed up for a few weeks to refurbish. The kitchen was rearranged to make more efficient use of the space; the electrics were rewired, the whole of the shop was ripped out and rebuilt in sturdier fashion. But much of the newly useful space, instead of being allowed to simply make a more pleasant working environment, was given over to a large coffee machine. This meant that Mary was able to develop the restaurant’s ability to provide fashionable ‘artisan coffee’ and compete with the other café in the market to do so.

I helped out with some of the refurb. I spent a day smashing tiles off the wall with enthusiasm while Mary and her husband debated details of sink positioning and power point lay out. It was an opportunity to adapt and develop the business; every change that was being made reflected an idea that Mary had about how she wanted her business to be run. The chefs were to have more space to allow them to focus more on plating, the menus were to become slightly more ‘restauranty’. The front of house were also given more space for making coffees and cocktails. All of this planned with the intention of extracting better margin from the business. We had to rearrange the wiring for both broadband and electricity. I helped while Mary’s husband built a stud wall to support the new bar-top, I expertly held pieces of wood and was occasionally allowed to hammer a nail or screw in a screw – provided there would be something to hide it afterwards. It did give me a genuine sense of connection to the business as I helped and I could see why Mary took such pride in the efforts she had gone to improve the restaurant. When she spoke about the future and her fears she told me “giving up this shop front, and the love that we’ve put into this place would be really heartbreaking”.

The market's infrastructure was not adequate for the demands being put on it by the wave of restaurants that had entered the space. Mary told me that the landlords had not looked after the market very well at all, instead they had let the tenants quietly upgrade the infrastructure themselves "they keep very quiet when we put in three phase electrics [...] they're very murky about it if its anything that you can claim they should be paying". Malcolm still fed two cats which he had brought into the market to help control rodents. An ongoing battle surrounded the issue of drainage. During my first visit to the restaurant Mary's husband was re-plumbing the sink having removed the fat trap – subsequently we had to be vigilant about what went down the sink and I, along with other staff, made regular trips to the local hardware store to buy one-shot sink unblocker. The shortcomings in drainage provision meant that there was a physical limit as to how many restaurants that could be supported by the market, though Mary felt that this was not being "monitored or enforced". However the massive transition from a market that was designed for shops into a market dominated by restaurants had happened. If you walk around the market it is clear in the nature of the built environment that this was a consequence of gradual and unplanned transformation – not wholesale re-engineering.

If you let your eyes drift above the shop fronts you see the chaos of wires running between the shops. Large boxes with yellow warning signs with cables running in and out, dozens of wires tacked wildly to the wall. Some painted to camouflage them, others standing out – clearly installed since the last paint job. This chaos is evidence of the fact that the changing use of the market has outpaced its infrastructure. The market managers appear to let changes happen only after they become urgent. After the refurbishment our phone line stopped working in the restaurant. This left us without internet, wi-fi being a key requirement for both the running of the till and the service of daytime customers. After a little detective work I was eventually able to fathom that our phone line had become crossed with that of the neighbouring butcher. I was working when the electrician, who had been responsible for the crossed wires, came to correct his mistake. He stood on top of a step ladder and sorted through the dozens of wires that ran across the front of the shop "it's like a birds nest in here" he said. Throughout my fieldwork I was not able to identify any sense in which the historic importance of the market to the Afro-Caribbean community was reflected in the built environment. I could not tell what English Heritage were protecting. However, the ongoing history of adaptation that had allowed the market to continue to operate through the constantly changing circumstances in which the tenants did business – was evident in abundance.

In the listing of the market there is a suggestion that there is some actually existing cultural importance to the building which is indexical of the market's significance to the Afro-Caribbean community. However, getting to know the market as I did it was evident that that heritage was fading or non-existent both in terms of the businesses and customers and the built environment. In this section I have argued that the market would better be understood as an index of a long history of commerce – from its speculative construction as Granville

Arcade (6.2) to its more recent transformations the chaotic infrastructure of the market reveals a history of adaptation to a changing commercial environment. The market's symbolic power in Brixton is derived from its ability to reflect the community. This is the truly authentic aspect of the space, that as with the Parisian arcades (Benjamin 1999b) when strictly attended to it is possible to observe the social conditions of the neighbourhood. Whereas if we look past this alienating gloss we can see the market first for what it is - a space of commerce, and a space of alienation, but also a place in which society is produced and therefore a position from which alternative social conditions can be imagined. The remaining sections of this chapter will pay strict attention to the market. First an ethnographic account of a Sunday at the market to provide a sense of what the market is like when encountered as a customer, second interviews with 'traditional traders', and thirdly a detailed account of working in the market. This will lead to a concluding discussion about what it would be mean to 'preserve' the market which will bring together an account of alienation and authenticity in the context of this space.

6.6 Sunday morning June 2014

There are those who circle to consider their options and those who head straight for their creperie of choice. "It's so good, you'd love it", someone says to their friend. The seats outside the restaurants blend into one homogenous space for eating with gaps left for waiters ferrying food. Queues slink alongside the shops that don't serve anything you can eat, the people working in the few that remain open peer out at the passing crowds. Two men about my age have been waiting ten minutes to sit down for a crepe. They survey the tables, they are wearing shorts and flip-flops, they alternate between snatches of conversation and checking their phones. They possess a trait which can be seen all around the market, the anxiety of the seatless. It is an anxiety which only becomes more acute with time, to be hungry in a queue in Brixton Village Market is to be very hungry indeed.

I'm alone drinking a coffee, this is only my second visit to the market with the intention of writing fieldnotes. I look around wondering if there is anybody here that I recognize, the people surrounding me are so familiar. I am in a terrible mood and the easy legibility of the people in this market makes a satisfying and cruel sport. Returning to the notes to write this I find myself removing numerous sarcastic snarky remarks at the expense of the people who surrounded me. I am not the only person scrutinizing passersby, when it is busy the market can get crowded and one must pass others closely, even as they sit down to eat. I see myself reflected back in the mirrored sun glasses of one passing man.

I'm sitting outside of Federation Coffee looking at Senzala Creperie. I'm drinking a flat white and eating a croissant. The sun is out and it is glowing through the mucky glass roof. A banner celebrates the market's

recent prize – best private market 2013 – awarded by NABMA (National Association of British Market Authorities). The market is festooned with an array of flags from around the world. I can see Okan a Japanese street food restaurant, Italian deli Sibila, A vintage store called Rejuvenate, Brixton Grill and Circus. Circus is particularly eye catching as its façade is entirely covered in brown cardboard tubes, it sells a range of homewares, clothes, and other things.

My table is made of varnished planks and I'm sitting on a stool made of unvarnished wood. It has a star stamped on it to correspond to the shop's livery. The shop opposite has mismatched furniture and flowers in glass bottles. The aesthetic is a makeshift one, as if these businesses were newly established, however many of them have been here since 2010, and have found success in the interim. I leave my table to use the toilet, shared by the whole market, it costs twenty pence to use. On some days there is an attendant whose main job seems to be preventing people from holding the door open for the next person. I wonder whether the charge is a genuine money making concern or just a means to prevent people wandering in to use it from the street.

There is free face painting and an art workshop outside today, and "Brixton's Big Lunch". There is bunting. I'm going to participate in the art workshop, two young men are confused by the rules of engagement, as am I. A woman walks past the big lunch buffet eating a sandwich, she is wearing leggings and a colourful vest "free food?" she says loudly knowing the answer will be "sorry, no". The security guard looks her up and down dismissively as she heads back to the street, she blows him a kiss with a mouthful of sandwich, laughing. I draw a pineapple and join the two young confused people to add to a large and growing drawing on two A0 boards. An American illustrator is running it, a teacher who runs illustration events and illustrates for the Brixton newspaper. She recently drew the illustrations for a Brixton Village cookbook being launched that day (I buy a copy and get it signed with good luck for my PhD).

The two young guys and I start talking while we draw. They've come from Hackney to visit the market. One is a geographer and once I explain my project we discuss the market. "It's a fallacy, Orientalism, Said and stuff – its being produced for people like us" they tell me. One asks me if I'm using Lefebvre, I tell him I'm trying to avoid it, he explains the right to the city to his friend and to me, How the city is being made for the bourgeoisie. We all agree.

6.7 "Traditional traders"

Mary called them traditional traders, which seems somehow euphemistic – what she meant was the fishmongers, the grocers, the butchers that had been in the market well before the *Spacemakers* project. The relationship between the traders I spoke to who had been in the market before the beginning of the period covered in this

chapter revealed an ambiguous response to what had happened. Omar runs a Latin Caribbean shop, I spoke to him after the guy who ran the shop over the road told me I should speak to him when I asked for an interview. These were people who ran businesses I walked past everyday on my way to work but knew very little about. Occasionally we would buy an avocado from one when we were in a tight spot – but other than that interactions were limited. His shop had been open for about ten years and he was quick to highlight the changes that had happened.

To be honest with you we were really busy here – then the community in the market is different. Before we had a market like this without restaurants different shops that sell food stock no restaurants.

[me: has it had an effect on your business?]

The only thing its had on my business is concerning the car park. That's the only issue but if you want to make a change the change can make no difference, it can make a difference but not a lot basically. Most of our customers they don't have a parking space so they prefer to go to Peckham, or what do you call it... East Street [in Walworth]

Again the ambiguity between competition and community came up:

It's a competition everywhere but it depends on how you handle your customer... yeah we're friends, we're friendly here, everybody friendly because we watch each other's businesses we're not just friendly we watch because if somebody grabs something they're going to say "Ay! What are you doing? Put it back down!" They're going to watch.

Omar was also ambiguous about the suggestions that the market was racist, I mentioned the march that had come through the market and made that claim [discussed in chapter 5], “To be honest with you I never come across that in my life here, this area we’re friendly with everyone”. I asked him about the restaurants, mentioning to him that mainly white people go to them – but he wasn’t interested in answering me “to be honest I don’t know, to be honest with you”. So the community of traders remained strong despite the pressures from the removal of car parking. Omar appeared pragmatic and confident that his business could survive through the restaurants he now sold to and long standing customers. During the week, which was when I spoke to him, the balance between restaurants and other shops seems more cordial – but mainly it seemed that Omar wanted to get on with providing a good service.

Mei, who worked next door, seemed to have a more difficult time with her business. Perhaps because it brought her more directly in contact with the new customers of the market. In contrast to Omar – who spoke very calmly about what had happened in the market, Mei was animated and upset at various points in our discussion. “The market did not have any meeting with us or tell us that there would be lots of restaurants opening in here”. Existing traders like Mei did not have the benefit of three months free rent, neither were they involved in any consultation about what would happen in the market following its listing. Her business, selling wigs, was particularly vulnerable to the changing demographic of the market customer “I can say that it is all gone, you look at the market, where is my customer? Its not good for me!”. Mei was relying on a few elderly regular

customers, but she feared what would follow. The restaurant customers are of almost no value to her business, whilst groceries can expect a level of passing trade the wig business is not so fortunate. “hang around here after 7, you will see the amount of people coming in here, flopping [sic] in here for food, it was unreal – god help me”. I asked her if any of the white customers ever came in to her shop:

Yes – problem – they don’t come to buy, they just come to try a lot on. Problem especially in the weekend, Friday, Saturday, they come in group they want to try and they want to take photo that’s why my friend – look what did I do? [she gestures to a sign saying £5 to try on a wig]. That is the only way to stop them I am fed up with all these trying. What else should I do? They curse me when they saw it you know! Some of them they say to me – you can’t do that you have to allow people to try it, if we don’t try it how do we know what we look like – than you very much I said, I’m not interested in how you look like in my wig – is that not true my friend?

As Mei told me this story in her shop she got visibly upset, her experience of the change to the market was clearly a difficult one. She told me that “when I pack up from this shop, I’m going to make a documentary about how rude people are.”

However in other ways she was enthusiastic about the changes to the market, she was not at all bitter towards the new businesses coming in. To Mei it was the landlords, and the new customers that were distressing her. She had eaten in many of the restaurants “I like the Honest Burger chips, have you tried their chips? I don’t know how they do it and it is so crunchy”. She saw how she could adapt her business to fit the new situation. Mei wants to open a restaurant serving Malaysian food, she would serve wan ton soup, chicken curry, roti. However she isn’t allowed to build a kitchen in her shop serving what she described as “Malaysian authentic Chinese food”. She was totally wise to the grammar of the new restaurants that had opened in the market and could see a clear opportunity for herself. It is essential to recognize that the business owners that preceded the transformation of the market are not passive victims, but are actively trying to maintain their businesses whatever it takes. But the market manager had told her “there are too many [restaurants] here the council is stop us from opening. They want to keep us as what we are doing at the moment but they have to understand we can’t pay our rent.” I asked her whether she had spoken to a councillor or MP.

Pffft, waste of time, Tessa Jowell [Local Labour MP 1992-2015] has been here before. We talk to her, does she listen?! They have their own agenda. I think they did a good job as well by doing that. At least it’s occupied. It’s good for the landlord, he get good money, so they should look after the old shop if they want us to stay isn’t it! Actually! I’m talking to you as if you’re the landlord, you should look after the old ones you have so much income now from the new ones!

Mei’s complaints weren’t about the cruelty of gentrification, they were about the fact that she was not being allowed to adapt her business to fit the new situation. Which is perhaps an even more serious accusation. New businesses have been given the opportunity and the financial leeway to come into the market and transform their new spaces into new businesses. Were it not for the initial period of free rent it would have been far more

challenging for those adaptations to be made. Some, like Omar, are able to keep on selling, groceries are a bigger market than wigs, but Mei's business is struggling and she has ideas which she is not able to enact. Adapting to the new environment is made easier for some businesses than for others.

6.8 Alienation from the means of production

Working in a quiet restaurant is painful. The perception of Brixton Village Market is that all the businesses there are coining it, that is certainly how I imagined it before I became a waiter at the Restaurant. Some of the businesses there have become very successful, Honest Burgers (Gordon 2015) and Franco Manca (Aglionby 2015) are two very notable examples having expanded into chains with multi-million pound valuations. However when you know you only have £3 for the shift in the tip jar and you've not served a customer all afternoon the glamour of being part of a 'gentrifying' business is not all it is cracked up to be. The rest of this chapter will describe the experience of being a waiter in the market and focus on the alienated position I occupied whilst I was doing this work.

As mentioned in section 6.5 In March 2015 the restaurant did a refurb, it was closed for two weeks. I helped a little – mainly holding wood whilst Leo drilled or sawed. It did make me feel good to have been involved in the very construction of the business where I worked, gave me a sense of ownership – though no remuneration to match. I even got to screw in a few screws myself – which I did quite badly, trying to work out where the joist was behind the sheet of ply was quite difficult and I put screws in and took them out until some parts of the bar we were building to separate the kitchen from the customers began to look like a colander. Luckily for everyone it was going to be covered with cork tiles. When it finally reopened there was a sense that regular customers had stopped coming. There had to be some reason anyway for the incredibly quiet shifts I spent there in early April. Whether it was the bank holiday, the refurb, or the weather Claude and I were very bored. One afternoon I sat down to write notes and Claude messed about in the kitchen making some kind of strange dish which I failed to take note of. Claude was a lovely guy but he wasn't a very good chef and before too long he would slowly slip off of the rota. This was the only time I ever wrote notes at the restaurant, when I could actually convince myself to put pen to paper after a shift it was always at home and I was always shattered.

An important thing to know is that people who work in restaurants hate quiet shifts most of all. Busy-ness can be stressful but quietness is almost as tiring and far more grueling. In my case it seemed to lead to something akin to an existential crisis, I wrote in my notes

The last two days have been so quiet, tomorrow is my Birthday. The way one relates to the emptiness of a restaurant is interesting. Embodying the business, its slowness makes me feel pain in a way, maybe it is my fault for playing weird music. The market feels quiet in general I spend a fair amount of time wondering about what is going wrong.

I seem to have been hamming it up a little, Claude wasn't even very good company, at least when I worked with other chefs we could spend afternoons gossiping or talking about food.

Claude interrupted my note taking, I wrote:

Claude just came in and asked me about what I was writing, I didn't really know what to say. I don't really know what I am learning anymore, it's time I changed focus probably [...] Boredom is a curious feature of research but perhaps it means I'm getting things wrong

May and June would go on to be two of my busiest months at the restaurant, I would sometimes work four or five shifts in a week and frankly I stopped thinking about my research. At the time I was concerned that being a waiter was boring, that it was irrelevant to my research questions. I took notes about exciting things when they happened but for some of that summer I was a waiter well before I was an anthropologist. As I come to write my thesis it is apparent to me that the tired legs, the skin drying from washing up liquid, the cuts on my hands from putting my hands into full sinks without thinking and finding a knife, are evidence of the forms of alienation which are produced in the wake of a changing neighbourhood. In this small way I allowed my body to be injured in order to sustain a process of profit making from which I would extract only the tiniest benefit through my minimum wage job.

It is Saturday night, the restaurant opposite has organised for a band to play outside, they do this every weekend – and through a combination of terrible bands and terrible PA systems, the resulting sound is truly painful. It is July and Pop Brixton has been open for almost two months. We are blaming Pop for the quietness of the evening. It is creeping towards 9 and we've had barely 10 covers, several of whom only wanted cocktails. Alice is working with me, she is studying Sociology at Manchester and I try to give her advice about her dissertation. The band outside play atrocious jazz, painful saxophone squeals that rent the air and make my *Spotify* playlist inaudible.

I am leaning with my back to the coffee machine eating a chorizo and halloumi wrap and staring out of the window willing passersby to come into the restaurant. Occasionally if someone stands still long enough considering the place I will rush outside and accost them let me show you our specials board... Have you seen a menu... or I'll just smile and tidy a table to give myself a vague pretext. Some nights we would have a

few beers from the fridge. Other nights whilst we had no customers in the restaurant *Deliveroo* the delivery app would keep the chef busy – however we hated *Deliveroo* because we didn't get any tips. I would stare at the opposite restaurant, baffled as to how they could be drawing in customers over us. Though perhaps it was the grim image of the very large waiter staring blankly from the window that made the restaurant less appealing. After a double I would hate everything, trudging home along Coldharbour Lane smoking cigarettes and listening to podcasts with only a fiver in tips and another shift in the morning. The notion that “hipsters” working in coffee shops and cafes in Brixton were swanning around flush with cash felt absurd.

Lambeth Council have identified the success of food businesses in Brixton since the transformation of Brixton Village Market, and they have responded by including further space for cafes and restaurants in their future planning. Pop Brixton, a shipping container temporary development completed in May 2015, exemplifies this. The Evening Standard heralded it as “South London's Latest Foodie Hub” in the headline of an article immediately before it opened (Norum 2015). Pop Brixton lists 22 of its 54 members as being food and drink businesses (Pop Brixton 2017). The importance of food and drink to Brixton's economy are evident in the queues that trail out of various businesses on Friday and Saturday Nights, this makes it essential that the forms of labour which these businesses rely on are thought about carefully.

6.9 Front of house

Doing the rota at the restaurant was an appallingly irritating job; I didn't have to do it but for the people that did take responsibility for it the fact that all of the staff were students or freelancers made scheduling intensely difficult. Mary seemed to take some pride in the fact that many of the staff were students, photographers, artists, musicians, actors and so on – however it meant that our availability varied wildly week to week.

James was an art student, he started at about the same time as me he was studying painting at an art college. I learned as I got to know him that he was actually older than me, despite being an undergraduate. He had previously worked in finance, bought a house, almost gotten married, before he realised he wasn't doing what he wanted to do so he went to art college. As with all of the students James' availability was affected by whether it was term time or not.

Chloe had been working at the restaurant since she was 15, she was 20 now, she knew everything about the business and despite her age often took on managerial responsibilities. She would do ordering, training, she would write to do lists for us. Chloe was the person you would ask if you had a question about the restaurant,

there were many occasions that people would ask her advice rather than Mary. She was also responsible for writing the rota which meant that she was often on the receiving end of the anger of other front of house staff. Chloe was an actor, so that she at various times needed weeks off for rehearsal.

Antonia was French, she was also studying painting – she was notable for being very small. I always liked working with her as she preferred to wash up rather than wait tables. She intermittently went home during holidays and didn't work at the restaurant at all over the summer.

Claire was an Irish photographer and worked freelance alongside her job at the restaurant. She was a very experienced restaurant worker and she was employed as a supervisor or restaurant manager, or something. She was paid more than me and she was in charge of more things. She was also a fantastic leftie and we spend various hours talking about unionising the restaurant workers of the market.

Andre was the same age as Chloe and they'd been working together for about as long as each other. The result was they were full of bickering, in an exhausting and inexhaustible brother/sister dynamic. Andre was at university studying film, he was passionate about what he did and would talk at length about it. He had given up a promising career as a sprinter when he was younger because there was so little guarantee that it would go anywhere.

Marcus was another art student, but not in the same place as James and Antonia. I very rarely worked with him, which made me nervous that he hated me. He was very good friends with one of the chefs, who was my favourite to work with, so perhaps it was just because we both wanted the same shifts. Unlike James who seemed quite straight down the line in his approach to painting Marcus made more unusual art works he wore tracksuits almost exclusively and often had his hair dyed different colours.

There was a clear tendency to employ people who did not have to rely exclusively on working at the restaurant for their income, and who brought with them a certain amount of cultural capital. Phil Crang wrote about the value of “stage backgrounds” (1994:284) to the staff that worked with him at ‘Smoky’s’ in Cambridge recorded in his article *It's Showtime*. In the context of an early nineties American style chain restaurant performance was the skill most valued; in the context of a restaurant in a trendy covered market in South London in 2015 it is ‘creativity’ and cultural capital.

The further advantage to employing such people (as in Brixton Smoky's employed numerous students (Crang 1994)) is that they are employees that will accept a level of precarity that others would not be able to. Karla Erickson has suggested that young bodies and “agility” are also a contributing factor to the employability of

the young (2004:80). Based on my own experience I'd disagree with the aestheticized quality with which she imbues the job of waiting tables – “the dance of service” (2004:80), however it is certain that the job required a level of physical stamina or at least ability to tolerate the sore feet, the occasional heavy lifting (bend with your knees) and broken glasses and sharp knives. Both Crang and Erickson refer to performance using theatrical analogies, and of course referencing Goffman (1967, 1969). In the restaurant where the most important form of flexibility was the one that related to my availability, I was willing to work for minimum wage and terrible tips.

This kind of casual and precarious labour underpins Brixton's transformation into a neighbourhood which is beginning to attract architects offices and will likely become a place associated with the cultural economy. Beyond observation of precarious and casual labour in the cultural economy proper (Gill and Pratt 2008) it is necessary also to observe the mundanities (Amin and Thrift 2007:158) that help produce the cultural economies which evidently play some role in the transformation of neighbourhoods such as Brixton. The flimsy working conditions of restaurant workers are necessary to sustain the Floridian (Florida 2014) entrepreneurial dreamworld that planners have been persuaded to prioritise, this is certainly the case in Brixton. In Brixton my conversations with council officers affirmed that restaurants like the one I worked in were a condition of bringing in big creative economy businesses. Businesses like Squire and Partners, the large architectural firm which is currently refurbishing the Bon Marche building (see section 5.2). At its very heart the economic transformation of Brixton relies on the alienation of workers such as myself to sustain the entrepreneurial image that attracts wealthier customers and wealthier businesses.

6.10 Zero (hour) rights

I didn't ever sign a contract, and despite inquiring as to whether I was a zero-hour employee in April and being reassured that I was not a contract was never forthcoming and my hours were based on the needs of the restaurant and my availability. This meant that my hours fluctuated wildly – this was largely to my convenience as it allowed me to fit in other parts of my research. I could have made more of a fuss about securing a contract, I could have pushed to have my wages increased, but I did not. In part this was because of my position as a researcher, I did not want to throw my weight around. However this was an invaluable source of income as with the other students who worked there. Speaking to other staff I heard regular acknowledgements of low pay and frustrating working conditions; however in the 6 months I was there few staff left, and when I popped in from time to time throughout the second half of 2015 I would often find the same staff there. A number of times Andre fell out dramatically with Chloe or with Mary but would inevitably be called on again when last minute cover was needed – and he would come back.

Sometimes chefs who hadn't worked for years would come in again for a shift or two just to help out. Jen, a Scottish chef who did freelance chef work for events and at other restaurants worked a few shifts with me. She had been one of the original chefs at the restaurant and regaled me with stories of how relaxed and sociable the market had been in the early stages of its transformation into what it was now. She was still in a relationship with a man who had been a chef at another restaurant in the market. She told stories about relaxing with other restaurant staff and drinking after shifts, going out together, socialising, much more of a party atmosphere she told me. There was a mixture of fondness and resentment for the staff at the restaurant that would be best compared to that between family members. However much grumbling there was most of the staff had a concern for how well the business was going, we wanted Mary to do well, we wanted the restaurant to succeed – all this for less than £7 an hour.

Gordon Marshall reflected on this in a very different restaurant: 'Dixie's' in a city in an unnamed suburb of an unnamed city in Scotland (1986). Dixie, a former boxer, was doing very well out of the restaurant despite only declaring £90 a week, a modest wage at that point, he was able to lead a life of luxury due to the income he made from "fiddles" (1986:36). Marshall's starting point for his article is the the paradox that poorly paid and overworked staff display high job satisfaction (1986:33).

Dixie's Place offers a compelling illustration of capitalist hegemony. Dixie worked his employees hard, transparently extracted a profit from their labours, yet they neither grudged him his riches nor attempted to change their circumstances. Indeed the extent of staff identification with the objectives of the capitalist enterprise was such that the first question on everyone's lips each evening at closing time was 'How did your till go?' (1986:42)

One of the reasons for this that Marshall provides is a blurred line between work and play (1986:42). In the case of the restaurant I experienced some similar contradictions. I felt physically exhausted and underpaid, nights where we made no tips were frustrating, I like all of the staff recognized the limitations of the way we were being managed. However as described above when the night was quiet I felt personally culpable. My colleagues would complain at length but ultimately they would be forgiving.

In August I was given no shifts at all because I had not filled out my availability; so aside from one or two cover shifts I decided to stop working at the restaurant. Having begun to feel like I was a key part of the team and like my labour and knowledge was particularly valuable, despite the fact that remuneration did not support this view, this made me very angry. I sent an ill-tempered email:

Wait so I've basically been made redundant? Thats not really cool. TBH I should have been given a contract by now with minimum hours, given that Rosie was so keen to tell me that I wasn't on a zero hour contract and I have now been working since february on not only a zero hour contract basis but a zero contract basis.

I realised that my labour was utterly replaceable and it was hurtful. The feeling of having my efforts reduced to mere man hours was maddening. Everyone who worked there had some kind of angst over the rota at some point, whether it was that they were being given too many or too few shifts. At the time of my email Chloe was in charge of the rota, I felt really guilty for losing my temper so badly, and with someone much younger than me.

Here lies one of the central contradictions of working in such a job. All of the staff had some kind of 'creative' past time. Each of us came into our jobs with a substantial amount of accrued cultural capital. We were expected to show our knowledge of food and coffee in our jobs, we were encouraged to develop 'barista skills' – I took quite some pride in my ability to produce good steamed milk for coffees and pour it in such a way as to decorate the surface of the drinks with hearts (I never managed a fern). However these skills which allowed our boss to create a 'cool' and 'unique' atmosphere for her restaurant were not actually special at all. In London there are thousands of students with latte art skills waiting to be employed in cool coffee shops in up and coming areas.

The workers who staff the cafés and restaurants of Brixton Village Market are largely young, culture rich and cash poor – Mary was in a similar situation (section 6.4). As workers we must insist that we are remarkable in order to fit the profile of employee in such places, however as I worked my shifts I realised I was anything but. Slowly the hopeful lie that such businesses are somehow better workplaces than your average chain unravels as the wages stay low and the tips still don't make up for it. Eventually I realised that I was an interchangeable part of the machine, despite knowing the owner of the business and giving my opinion on the formulation of the baba ghanoush I remained alienated from the means of production. As with workers, businesses scramble to claim cultural difference through notions of 'independence' and 'entrepreneurship' or even 'artisanship' and 'craft' – otherwise 'authenticity'.

The restaurant where I worked was minute both as a business and a physical space. We could accommodate about 20 customers at any one time and this did not happen as often as would have been desirable. It lent an intimacy to the relationships between the employees, but also between employee and employer. Mary would regularly work shifts as chef or front of house in the kitchen and when she was there she was colleague as much as boss. As such I developed an intimate understanding of how well business was going, of how the business worked, of the morale of fellow staff and of our employer. As indicated above, I also felt personally responsible for the nights when the restaurant was empty. However ultimately there was little we could do to influence the takings. I took a pride in upselling, and most of the other front of house staff were good at making sure they were offering sides and puddings and extra glasses of wine. I found it cringeworthy but appreciated that it was necessary – people like Chloe were great at doing this. When the restaurant was empty

though upselling was not much use – I know that many of the staff were frustrated when we were given responsibility for things we could not control:

Hi guys, sales are really down this week can we all work extra hard to get people spending tonight and over the weekend. Suggest that second cocktail, sell bottles of the amazing white wine you all tasted. Top seller gets a prize on Sunday. (WhatsApp message from Mary)

When we received this message I and some of my colleagues took umbrage at the insinuation that we were not working hard enough. Of course Mary was just doing what she could to try to encourage us, but it felt like a rebuke. This is what it is to work in a small business; complaints about pay, rota, breaks were easy for me to allow to pass as I could see the takings, and I knew when we didn't take enough to cover the day's overheads. Rather than being 'mere' employees in a small business it is possible to believe oneself a proxy for the owner and accept a distribution of responsibility and worry without an adequate distribution of money. In fact, I had little if any idea of how our takings translated to profit, or how the shifts I worked on contributed overall, but the closeness I felt to the restaurant led me to assume a false proprietorship.

The insidiousness of the notion of the 'independent small business' is that it disguises the brute fact that these are businesses which exist solely for the creation of profit. Of course this is what they do. The moral values attributed to smallness and youthfulness and localness and so on – all ways of claiming 'authenticity' – are ultimately divisive. In the chain restaurant in Crang (1994) the expectations of the job are realistically low; similarly in Marshall (1986) the job satisfaction is in spite of a clear understanding that the boss is exploiting his workforce and business for substantial illegal gain. In the environment of Brixton Village Market there remains a sense of hopefulness for some of the businesses that there is a form of commerce that does not require poorly paid staff, understaffing, long shifts. I didn't find any evidence that there was a corresponding reality to this ideal. The halcyon days of the businesses coming into the market referred to by some of the old hands occurred on the back of three months free rent for many of the new ventures, and subsequent low rents that have since been hiked. The unpleasant truth is that whether your bread is sourdough or Mother's Pride businesses still rely on the exploitation of a workforce. The businesses that have comfortably been able to institute the living wage are not friendly hip cafes but Lidl and Aldi (Armstrong 2015).

6.11 Conclusion, what is being preserved?

The notion that the market would be somehow preserved was, with the benefit of hindsight, a naïve one held by some and a disingenuous one presented by others. As a building it had its origins in speculation and its

various owners have always sought to maximize return. The brutal truth about the market is that it is a market, and that it does not hold some kind of secret essence of community in the steel that holds up the glass roofs or the concrete that cracks across the floor. The business owners have been perceived from the outside to be the ones making money, however it has proved very hard to do so. Since the end of my research the restaurant which I worked in closed because they could not secure a lease which would give them enough security to sustain the business, similarly one of the original new businesses to enter the covered market *Rosie's* has closed. In the same time larger companies have continued to move into Brixton. A large Caribbean food chain called Turtle Bay has now opened in Brixton, bringing its commoditized and whitened take on Caribbean cuisine to a neighbourhood where there are dozens of places to eat jerk chicken, goat curry, rice and peas, ackee and salt fish and so on. In the weeks before the Brixton branch launched the chain drew criticism for its “#rastafyme” campaign (Mullin 2015) which took photographs of customers and digitally added dreadlocks and darkened their skin. The proudly ‘independent’ regeneration from new businesses of Brixton are falling to the wayside as a further wave of commercial interest is coming to exploit the growing opportunity in the neighbourhood.

In this chapter I have given a thick description of Brixton Village Market with both a long view of its history and a contemporary ethnographic perspective. In doing so the market has emerged as a contested space and a space which has a long history of adapting to the social and economic circumstances of the neighbourhood. The issue raised in the previous chapter, of what is there to be reclaimed, or preserved is more direct in relation to the specific circumstances of Brixton Village Market, it is also more straightforward to answer. There is an ‘authentic’ essence that runs through the historical iterations and the synchronic variations of Brixton Village Market but it is not one of culture or class, the market has served a range of different customers in its lifetime, it is simply that it is a market. The most consistent factor in the complex transformations that the market has undergone is that these changes have ultimately always served to maintain its commercial viability – and that is why it has survived.

Mary ran a business that was as good to work in as any other and she kept staff for a long time, some of them kept returning (in one case after having been fired more than once). The people that worked at the restaurant were nice and the tips could be quite good when it was busy. The food was good and it was a pleasant enough place to work, we could choose our own music and were not overly managed. She wasn’t making a huge amount of money. Nevertheless, my experience as a waiter there was one of exploitation and alienation, not because of the business per se but because this is the nature of work, particularly un-contracted precarious work like the work which fuels the food industry. Mary had been one of the businesses that had turned around the market – she was one of the trendy restaurants which brought in new customers and new revenue and enabled the landlords to improve their rental returns. But ultimately just as I did not get a share of her profits that accounted fully for the labour I put into the business as a waiter she did not get a fair share of the money extracted from

the market by the landlords. It was alienation from the means of production all the way down and all the way up.

To protect the market can only be to protect the market's ability to produce profit for the landlords. Customers can come and go and businesses can change accordingly, but as long as it is in private hands it must continue to behave like a private asset and deliver a return. This is not to deny the qualities of the market which are valued beyond brute commerce. Various it has been and continues to be a space which caters to a specific community, one which supports new businesses, one which provides opportunities to consume things that provide pleasure to customers, a place for cultural experimentation and so on. Without a strong state intervention it is hard to control who has access to the market and what it contains; ultimately it must behave as it is named – as a market.

As suggested by Gibson-Graham (2006) economy is not a singular thing, between the market traders there are co-existing economies that operate on looser ideas of exchange and generosity, those of us who worked in the restaurants there for instance would often exchange our staff meals so that we wouldn't always have to eat the same thing and I would regularly realise I had been given a discount just because I was recognized as a fellow market worker by the person serving me. Within the capitalist mundanities of the market remain counter-images of how the market could be transformed rather than protected. The qualities which are mourned from the 'old days' were never the main qualities, just the best ones.

As with the arcades (Benjamin 1999b, see section 2.5) the wish-images of a utopian future are reified as commodity in Brixton village market. The almost proto-communist era of circus skills and no rent that heralded the beginning of the market's transformation quickly gave way only to be fossilised into alienating claims to authenticity such as 'street food', with authenticity becoming something that you can absorb into yourself just by eating it. The forces that Malcolm identified - "money" and "state power" came in to the market and ended that era of apparently unalienated authenticity where people could just "do things" (section 6.4). Mary recognised this change as people came in to cash in "on that image of Brixton". Spacemakers appear to have made some major errors, but they cannot be held wholly responsible for the fact that their utopian image of a market at the heart of the community could not be sustained in the face of the requirement that money is made. There is alienation and exploitation from bottom to top in the market, from barista to business owner an unalienated authentic existence whereby one is able to just do things, to be in control of one's own means of production, is given up to largely invisible others, the landlords, or Malcolm's bogeymen "money" and "state power". But the fossil dreams of authentic encounter and politics can be observed in the market. The following chapter will focus on eating and what is at stake socially and culturally when food is served and consumed. In

giving such strict attention to a basic commodity in the market I will show that the market contains not only a core of capitalist steel but a dream of radical encounter.

7. Eating and Encounter: alienation, authenticity and food

7.1 Introduction

*[E]at your fill of bread and wine.
Then you can tell me where you're from
and all the pains you've weathered* (Homer 303)

When food appears as a polluting object, it does so as oral object only to the extent that orality signifies a boundary of the self's clean and proper body. Food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories. A boundary between nature and culture, between the human and the nonhuman.
(Kristeva 1982:75)

Food is a contradictory substance that is on one hand utterly familiar, and the other utterly alien to the body. Eating, digestion and excretion a synthesis producing pleasure and disgust in a new formulation. As such food is a potent political, cultural, and social substance. In the twin images above of the generous host using food as a conduit for sociality and bonding and food as a foul exteriority which insists on crossing the most carefully defended boundaries of the self. My fieldwork in the soup kitchen and the restaurant naturally resulted in the constant presence of food and eating throughout my research, as such I was able to observe carefully the ways in which accrued claims to authenticity served to mediate the material alien-ness of edible substances, and importantly, to consider the ways in which these deep human responses to food came to interact with broader cultural, social and political aspects of the lives of those I met in Brixton. In a neighbourhood such as Brixton where diverse cultures meet and mix in everyday settings, food is a medium to establish or contest authenticity and alienation. Whether in the transformation of the strange into the safe in Brixton Village Market, or comfort and nourishment cut through by moments of fear and suspicion in the soup kitchen, food is a substance in which the politics of a fast changing neighbourhood become observable.

Brixton market on a Sunday morning can seem obscene if you allow yourself to register the number of hungry stomachs, eating mouths, and swollen bellies. Walking through on a busy day, with queues and diners seeming to coat every surface of the market, layers of bodies recovering from a previous night's excess. "The open mouth is the only opportunity for another to look inside our bodies" (Rozin 1999:27), to eat in front of others is to make oneself vulnerable. Food is an alien substance, and in restaurants and cafes we open ourselves up to it in public. Psychologist Paul Rozin describes the challenge of eating with others: "to suppress disgust in others in a situation that is rich with potential disgusting events" (1999:27). This chapter will start from the position

that food is disgusting, it will relate the materially alien nature of food to the cultural differences and similarities which are marked with edible substances. Relating this to my research in the restaurant and soup kitchen in Brixton, I will suggest that on one level disgust can be considered a manifestation of alienation, and that disgust is largely dealt with through claims to authenticity which are both alienated and alienating. Finally, with reference to the work of Michel Serres (2008) I will suggest that whilst currently food is a materialisation of an alienated politics – we might also consider how food can be a medium for a radically authentic and un-alienated social interaction.

7.2 *Alien Food*

It is remarkable that something as primal as eating has become such a commodity. To eat is to live, yet food in London and the experience of eating food are primary leisure activities, and as such they can command a remarkable range of prices. In the form of the restaurant the necessity of eating has been abstracted from its basic purpose into a vastly complicated cultural activity. Restaurants in London are no mere conveniences, particularly in recent years the restaurant and the ‘hipster café’ have become iconic of transforming neighbourhoods across the city. In particular markets have undergone a marked transformation from sites of pure provisioning to places where one purchases luxury products and consumes novel ‘street food’ as explored in detail in the previous chapter and roundly critiqued by Gonzalez and Waley (2013). One of the central points of this chapter is that in this transition from necessity to luxury food has become abstracted from the body, it seems ever rarer that food can just be food.

It is inaccurate to suggest that this is new. In terms of its material and cultural qualities food has long played a central role in the way we can construct the other and the self. In *Totem and Taboo* Freud places the act of sacrifice right at the very origins of religion and society as a whole sharing a meal was the establishment of “fellowship and mutual social obligations” (2001:156). For Freud it is also through food that social groups enforce the most fundamental moral boundaries, and a transition from ‘Darwinian savagery’ was possible (2001:164). Mary Douglas’ discussion of purity and danger has similarly placed food at the heart of the distinctions made between clean and dirty, inside outside and us and them (2002). However the position that food has in Brixton as a cultural marker, as a mode of distinction (Bourdieu 2010) which comes with substantial monetary expense, seems particularly acute.

Food is an alien substance, weaned off of our mothers’ bodies as infants we become reliant on food that is dramatically different from our selves, and yet we know we must incorporate it into our bodies. According to ethicist and biologist Leon Kass

[e]ating something means transforming it, chemically as well as physically. Eating comprises the appropriation, incorporation, and deformation of a complex other, and its homogenization into simples, in preparation for their transformation into complex same (Kass 1994:26).

Food starts as an alien substance but then it becomes our body, yet when food is something through which we attribute value because of its semiotic meaning not purely by the nature of our physical encounter with it – it will always remain alienated from us.

7.2.1 *The infant consumer*

If it is accepted that the quality of food that is the source of disgust, is that it is not the body, then babies have an easy start regarding food. For the early part of most childrens' lives they gain their sustenance from breast feeding, for a baby food comes from the most familiar body, perhaps even more familiar than their own at that young stage. Donald Winnicott placed the initial feeding of an infant, and the establishment of a relationship between mother and baby as the process by which a baby develops their ability to be in the world. "The only true basis for a relation of a child to mother and father, to other children, and eventually to society is the first successful relationship between the mother and baby" (Winnicott 1964:34), food is from the very earliest stages of life a means through which we develop a sense of self and other. At this point the baby has a totally dependent relationship to their parents, sharing profound intimacy and physical closeness. The relationship between healthy child and parent is unmediated, particularly at this stage, there are no natural barriers between their bodily lives.

Whilst it is perhaps utterly authentic, it is also utterly dependent and in order for the child to begin to develop a truly independent, and perhaps also truly authentic sense of self they must undergo "disillusionment" (Winnicott 1964:84) from their parents. This is how Winnicott describes weaning. Weaning is the process of persuading a child to accept food into their bodies from outside of their immediate domain of influence. Winnicott anticipates that a baby will feel betrayed being weaned from the breast, their ideal image of their parents challenged, ultimately though the child will get "to know her just as she really is, neither ideal nor indeed a witch." (Winnicott 1964:84). Food is among the means by which a mother can "makes herself known to her infant" (Winnicott 1964:104) and then as they are weaned they are introduced to the world at large, they become aware of themselves as separate from their parents and learn in time that their parents cannot and will not give their *entire* bodies and selves to them.

Children commonly refuse the food their parents give them as they grow older, but it is only through the help of their parents that a child begins to truly discern what "good food" is. Winnicott suggests that children are

not innately able to “feel” what is good food and what is bad food, only with the help of their parents are they able to eventually learn “what to call good, and what to call bad” (1964:127). The goodness of food is not immediately apparent, it must be learned just as we train ourselves in adulthood to like coffee and alcohol, as a child you must be trained to comprehend the systems with which the society you are born into classifies food.

It is important to emphasise that the object of discussion in this chapter is food, and not parenting. Arguably the mother child relationship is over-idealised in Winnicott, Nancy Chodorow has argued that psychoanalysis assumes a universal mother-child relationship and rarely includes an account of the social and individual specificity of such relationships (1978:77). As Chodorow puts it “the extreme constancy of care which psychoanalysts assume” (1978:77) is far from being a universal reality, Chodorow points out that the mother-child relationship though one of dependence “is not symmetrical” (1978:61) the narcissism of the child in this period of dependence is not necessarily recognised or appreciated by the mother. The nature of the mother-child relationship is not based on an essential universal but it is dependent on numerous other social factors, Chodorow has highlighted the criticisms of *Reproduction of the Mother* along the lines of its failure to question the idea of the mother in the context of class, sexuality, and ethnicity (1999:342 see also Valentine 1997) an issue that she has picked up elsewhere (Chodorow 1994). Given this thesis’ earlier references to intersectional theory it is important to recognise the short comings of the tidy image of the mother enforced by Winnicott. Whilst the analysis in this chapter takes psychoanalysis as a starting point ultimately I want to show that the self - other dichotomy that is presented as essential by Winnicott is better understood as a construction that emerges from a capitalist system which relies on alienation for the successful production of commodities. Ultimately this chapter aims to use food as an object through which to understand social conditions and not an ideal form of subject.

7.2.2 *Disgust and the waiter*

A customer came in with a child in a sling and another trailing behind her. I stepped out from behind the bar that separates staff from customer and handed her a menu. “Do you have anything gluten free?” she asked me, and in (justified) fear of judgement, she added “my daughter is coeliac”. I went through the gluten free options on the menu, she asked if any of the other dishes could be made gluten free, and that was when I decided to go off the menu “the slaw we use in the wraps has bulgur wheat in it, and I’m not sure if there is any bread in the merguez sausages, you never know with sausages” I thought a bit harder and turned towards the chef “we could do a little dish of lamb shoulder and hummus with a little salad” “that sounds good, would you like that Kitty?” the daughter looked up at her mother and also at me, she tentatively nodded her head. “Ok” said the mother, and ordered her own food.

Then began the negotiation between mother and daughter as to where they should sit. They went outside to inspect the tables but came back in, the mother said “are you sure you wouldn’t rather sit outside?” the daughter scrunched up her nose and made herself very clear “it smells of fish” she said. The seat they would have been sitting on is, to be fair to the small child, right beside a butcher. A butcher that can smell rosey at the best of times, but given the hot weather the small girl’s concerns seemed particularly reasonable. The mother realising that they could hardly help but be overheard qualified the daughter’s concerns “she has a very sensitive gag reflex” she said “sometimes smells make her almost throw up”. Negotiations over, the family sit down and the mother removes the smallest child, and puts them on the floor, she makes a comment about how she hopes the floor is clean, I think she means it in good humour.

As the chef cooks I continue with the washing up and tidying away. Shuffling things round in a vague way while the Italian chef Alberto prepares their food. After a few minutes I look over again and find the daughter taking something out of her bag, “would you like to show the man your mask?”. The little girl is trying to lift it to her face, it is made of shiny silver card with pie tins for eyes. It has streamers and bright coloured paper attached to a robot face, “did you make that yourself?” “Yes” she says, before the mother chimes in “she had some help”. We chat a little about the market until I take them their food. Other customers are asking for bills and I am clearing tables and washing up, an endless thankless cycle. After a little while I ask if the daughter is enjoying the food, she is looking at it and saying “I don’t like it” but her mother encourages her to persevere, making a comment about how fussy children can be. After a few more minutes the daughter catches my eyes and says “I like it now”, I say thank you, and tell her that she should tell Alberto, who looks over from where he stands in front of the hot grill and smiles awkwardly.

Our restaurant – I mean – the restaurant where I work – is smaller than many living rooms. The kitchen smaller than any kitchen I’ve ever had, except perhaps for one in a Paris studio, but it is a close run thing. Unless you are sitting outside, or if it is busy, much of what you say can be heard by everyone there. Though most of the time there is just enough low level clattering to frustrate the attempts I make to eavesdrop. It is a space where we are often at close quarters with our customers and always with one another. Table 5, when occupied, often requires me to brush past one of the diners every time I pass. As a waiter it is my job not to adopt one persona but to quickly read the customer and attempt to serve them as I imagine they might wish to be served. A successful waiter, is one who can be trusted to behave as you hope they might. It is an intimate and strange act, to have someone bring you food. Think of the emphasis put on notions of romance on breakfast in bed, or having food made for you. This is the job which I and my colleagues are involved in everyday. In the instance recounted above I was entrusted with knowledge of the medical predicament of the daughter of the customer and asked to ensure that she not be given food which is poisonous to her. That said, even if my incentive is in

part altruism, I know also that if I'm seen to be putting effort in to look after my customer's needs in precise and attentive ways – I will likely be tipped well.

The daughter understood that food could be dangerous, her nerves about the olfactory stresses of the market, and the terrifying tastes that are being offered up by people she doesn't know. The nerves that she presents in the face of food are not a matter of childish rudeness, but rather evidence of the fear that we suppress when we are served food in strange places. When someone goes into a restaurant to eat they entrust the people that work there with great responsibility, that the food will not poison them, that the space will be clean, or clean enough, there is a temporary transference of power from diner to waiter and chef. However in the moments that such trusts are betrayed – all hell is liable to break loose. When a waiter is perceived to have failed in their expected solemn promise to ferry food that does not disappoint and guard the customer from the unknown chef, as well as to tend to their every minor need, the customer is regularly empowered to scold, scowl or sulk – and to expect retribution upon their now nervous server by denying the tips that lift the waiter from truly shit pay to a level of sub-living wage that is deemed socially acceptable.

The intimacy of encounter that arises from the apparently simple exchange of food requires a complicated negotiation of power relations to accompany it in order for it to be acceptable. For Kitty, the daughter, it was much harder to suspend her disbelief that the food she was being given by a person she did not know was going to taste good than it was for her mother. Just as Kitty was prone to expressions of disgust when confronted by odours that the rest of us have learned to gloss over as we interact with the deeply uncanny provisioning of food which we have accepted as necessary. There are a complex set of deceptions on both sides of the relationship between waiter and customer that are entered into in order to manage the discomfort that might otherwise be felt. A young child must learn the coping lessons required of an adult who wishes to consumer food made by different bodies in different places to those which they are accustomed, but the squirm remains long after.

7.2.3 Eating the abject

At the head of the chapter I quoted Kristeva's essay on abjection, she comments that "food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories" (1982:75). So far I have focussed on the way in which food may always be seen to be an alien, crossing the border between self and other. Kristeva is talking more specifically about the ambiguities in food which pertain long past the lesson infants must learn - to accept the utterly different into their bodies in order to stay alive, to reconcile their hunger with their fear. Following the acceptance of the protection bestowed by the taxonomy of food, of what is good and what is bad

(Winnicott 1964:127) any food that worryingly straddles the boundaries to which we have become accustomed can re-awaken the base suspicion of food discussed above.

For Kristeva, the abject is that which makes us aware of our existence as bodies, “corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live” (1982:3). Abjection results from the recognition of something we have willed ourselves to ignore, not filth but “what disturbs identity, system, order” (1982:4). Kristeva suggests that where the body is considered as social, and thus “clean and proper” food comes to represent “the other (the natural) that is opposed to the social condition of man” (1982:75). She links this directly to the way in which food marks a primal boundary between self and other, mother (1982:76). It seemed clear that in the instance described above, the small girl was struggling with the others that surrounded her, and relied on her mother, her closest other, to help her in how to police the boundaries, and when to strategically allow them to be crossed in order to sustain oneself.

Mary Douglas makes it clear that she is sceptical of a tendency to interpret the body solely as an aspect of the individual psyche (2002:142). She says that we must “see in the body a symbol of society” (2002:142), thus not read rituals of the body as rituals of the personal, but always as being of society. Kristeva is sceptical of this perspective, in particular Douglas’ rejection of neurosis as a factor in the notion of defilement and ritual responses to it “naively rejecting” a Freudian analysis (1982:66). Whilst Kristeva follows Douglas’ emphasis on filth as a substance that crosses margins (2002:150) as something which relates to the maintenance of social boundaries she also values a reading of the ritual management of the abject as relating to neurosis. For Kristeva the religious rituals which are maintained in order to ward off impurity are also made “to ward off the subject's fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother” (1982:64).

I neither precisely agree with Douglas nor Kristeva. Douglas makes a structuralist distinction between *society* and *the body* while Kristeva points out that it is unclear whether she considers the body as actually an integrated microcosm of society or as a metaphor for it (1982:65). Kristeva talks of the fear of abjection, and the way in which it threatens the structures of society, without ever making a clearly political analysis. Whilst Douglas wishes to emphasise the social Kristeva makes “the horror of being” (1982:208) a universal psychological crisis. I wish to neither make the arbitrary distinction between *society* and *body* that Douglas does, nor the a-political nihilistic analysis that Kristeva does. Instead I wish to relate disgust, and the fear of the collapse of borders specifically to alienation, and to the social and economic conditions of capitalism.

7.3 *Different strokes for different folks*

There was a huge amount of shopping being brought up the stairs from a car when I arrived at the soup kitchen in July, the Monday after Eid. Monday is usually Pizza day, and it is usually one of the busiest lunches of the week. Franco Manca, the pizza restaurant in Market Row, donates 15 pizzas to the soup kitchen every Monday. Many of the women carrying the bags of shopping up the stairs were wearing hijab, they were all members of the congregation at the local mosque. It is traditional to make donations to the poor after Eid, a practice called Zakat al-Fitr. Usually when I arrive I see who is in the kitchen before I go and make myself a cup of tea. On that Monday however it was completely packed with women busily cooking. Fifteen or more unpacking bags full of tins, eggs, bread, milk and various other foods.

Among the many wonderful things about working at the soup kitchen was the tendency for surprising things to greet you when you arrived. The service users and I were perplexed about what was happening, I went in to the kitchen to replenish hot water and milk for teas and coffees and found out that they were cooking breakfast for everyone. Onions being chopped, eggs cracked, tins opened there was a lot of work going on. I was nervous that it would go to waste, somewhat horrified by the amount of different things going on at once. However ultimately almost all of the food got eaten or packed up to be taken home. Perhaps fear of excess is a phobia only for the privileged.

There is some confusion when someone comes out of the kitchen to see who wants to eat. Only two people initially say yes. I reassure the service users that we will still be eating pizza for lunch. John and Cynthia agree to eat something. Plates of scrambled eggs with sardines onions and peppers came out with slices of toast. A dish that only served to heighten the edginess – Cynthia gave it a long hard look and John prodded at it with a fork before beginning to eat. Plates of boiled eggs followed and before long a number of people asked to wrap food up and take it home even if they didn't want it then and there. I should have eaten some myself, now I look back at my fieldnotes I wish I had – but I had already eaten eggs for breakfast, which I considered a convenient excuse at the time.

The eggs and the confusion that resulted from them led to a discussion about food that followed Debbie leaving, she is a volunteer on benefits. She left early, before lunch, and said that she was going to go and get “a proper English breakfast” – seemingly as opposed to what was being served at the soup kitchen. She seemed genuinely perturbed. Natalie defused the bad atmosphere that followed this by saying “different strokes for different folks”. Natalie herself expressed a serious hatred for eggs, but she felt it necessary to emphasise that this was a matter of personal taste, as with the food being served that morning.

Eating puts the eater in a vulnerable position, particularly when they have not prepared the food for themselves. In order to consume food there is a required leap of faith that those preparing it are not trying to poison us.

The unexpected cooked breakfast, and the strangers in the kitchen created a nervous atmosphere at the soup kitchen. There was a level of suspicion that was added to by the fact that the women in the kitchen were hijab wearing Muslims. The food itself was deemed unusual, and was reacted to with disgust by some of the service users. In the dozens of meals that I was present for at the soup kitchen it was rare that food would cause such a reaction. There were numerous meals that were cooked by the volunteers when there were few donations that I found unpleasant; frozen burgers, tinned vegetables, overcooked pasta. These meals though were cooked by people that we all knew and trusted, the presence of women that nobody knew certainly created the context in which so many would respond with disgust. I felt strange about this change to routine also, though hopefully not effected by cultural prejudice I didn't eat the food. The act of taking food into the body is dangerous and strange, at the soup kitchen the mechanisms that exist to manage this complex set of material interactions that are cooking and eating are quite different to those that govern the function of food at a restaurant.

7.3.1 Proper Food

When Debbie talked about “proper English breakfast” the aggression in her voice was unnerving, and was clearly picked up by some of those around the table. It recalled the competitive and xenophobic eating practices that Ben Highmore has described in Indian restaurants (2008). I should be clear that I did not ever hear Debbie saying anything else that might be perceived as racist, and in fact there were numerous other more overt instances of racism and prejudice at the soup kitchen. What I was struck by as she left was the heightened emotion in her voice, she seemed truly unsettled by the food she was being offered. Whether this was due to conscious or unconscious prejudice I can't say – but the power of food to evoke aggressive disgust was clearly in evidence.

Sophie Watson and Karen Wells observed the abject disgust in response to Muslim food in their article about shopkeepers in their article ‘A Politics of Resentment: Shopkeepers in a London Neighbourhood’ (2005). One of the shopkeepers in this article recalls a customer describing the food of the local Muslim community – “it stinks, it's dirty” (2005:269). I watched service users prod and sniff the food that they were being brought out from the kitchen. Between the strangers in the kitchen, the disturbance to routine, the unusualness of the food, the situation created an expectation that the food would be somehow dubious. The rituals of protection that exist for the diner in the restaurant were not present that day in the soup kitchen.

The striking thing about the examples from Highmore (2008) and from Wells and Watson (2005) are that whilst they are speaking about instances of violent cultural prejudice, aggressive speech is merely a side effect of angry bodies. The encounter with difference is felt in the gut, and the puking revolted speech in Wells and Watson (2005) is part language part guttural groan. However Debbie's response whilst undoubtedly physical hardly seemed to share in the hatred witnessed in Watson and Wells. Alex Rhys Taylor's writing about sea food stalls in East London identified what he calls the "squirm" (2013b: 237). The liminal nature of seafood gives Rhys-Taylor the opportunity to explore what he suggests is the misattribution of disgust to the food stuff when a desire for class distinction may be the true basis for the tummy wobble (2013b: 237).

Whilst I accept the notion that expressions of disgust are culturally motivated, returning to the quote from Kristeva (1982) above, I contend that the disgust that food can elicit always comes from the body even where it is a manifestation of social or cultural prejudice. The young girl who came into the restaurant with her mother was suspicious of food given her in a strange place, it was only with the aid of her mother that she was able to believe that the food she was being offered was good. Food is a substance which can disturb the boundaries that individuals and communities come to rely upon. Elspeth Probyn puts it this way: disgust comes from the fear that others "will invade our bodies through our mouths" (2005:142). Anything is liable to fall within that category, by definition any substance outside of our bodies is alien and threatening to us.

Mary Douglas calls dirt matter out of place, which raises the issue – who is responsible for putting things in place? As a waiter one of my responsibilities was to make people feel at home, to assure them that the food that they would be served was firmly 'in place'. Barely an order went by without inquiries as to the nature of various ingredients, or where we bought our meat from. Here is where we meet the question of authenticity; if food is always strange to us, and it is education which allows us to suspend our disbelief long enough for food to pass our lips, then the motivation for businesses to provide a semiotic framework within which to situate their product is very clear. If I can be assured that the food I am eating adequately resembles some kind of ideal form of food whether it is sourdough pizza or Japanese street food it is less of a leap of faith for me to purchase it and consume it.

Food is inherently disgusting to us because capitalism demands that it is a commodity, the commodity must be totally other to the self, and the commodity demands that every other person is other to one's own self. As discussed in reference to Marx's 1844 manuscript (2000) in chapter 2, as a worker does not own the objects she produces, her labour must also belong to someone else who stands invisibly in opposition to them. The child who turned her nose up at her food, and had to be persuaded that it was edible, is a child who is responding to a society in which disgust is the manifestation of social alienation. The fundamental disgustingness of food is not symptom of pure psychology (whatever that would mean) but is necessarily a function of being in society.

The starting point when we encounter food is suspicion, because we know that somewhere down the line it has been handled and laboured over by an other who we cannot be sure of. We know also that as something we can consume it must be contained by a hard boundary, in order to distinguish its exchange value adequately. Subsequently those who are able to manipulate their cultural power in order to form lines of distinction between what is good and bad food (Winnicott 1964) just as the mother accepted the young child's horror at the butchers but not her scepticism of the meal she had been bought.

At the soup kitchen the sardine and egg breakfast was at once a meal cooked by strangers, a meal cooked by people who for some are coded as dangerous or suspicious, headscarf wearing muslim women. It was also a meal that service users were not accustomed to, breakfast was usually only cereal there and it raised some concern that the regular Monday lunch pizzas would not be arriving. In multiple ways it challenged the structures which kept the service users safe from the food that they were given at the soup kitchen. For Debbie it seemed to shake at the food structures that constituted Britishness for her, and she reacted with fear and racism.

7.3.2 Food people like to eat

After Debbie left, a discussion about the food that people like to eat starts up, as Natalie explains some of the things that she does enjoy cooking. She talks about the fresh food available at the market and the possibilities to eat healthily if you cook for yourself even if you are short on money. Although this also includes some minor theft, she mentions how easy it is to lift fruit and veg from market stalls "how else if you've got five to feed". People giggle at this a little but nobody finds it shocking. Natalie doesn't live with her children anymore.

Cynthia loves talking about food, it is her ambition to work in a kitchen. "Has anyone ever eaten venison?" she asks and then explains "at Iceland you can buy venison, kangaroo or crocodile burgers!!". Her and I get into further discussion about food as she explains to me her intentions to cook chicken cordon bleu at the soup kitchen. One of the volunteers who regularly cooks had suggested that she would be able to do this – and it had prompted great excitement. I sat next to Cynthia and watched her write long lists of different dishes that she would like to cook, occasionally piping up with a question for anyone who would answer "would plum cobbler be nice?". The lists were almost like word association: Peach Cobbler, Plum Cobbler, Apple Cobbler, Pineapple Cobbler, Pineapple crumble, Rhubarb Crumble, she was filling pages; starting at chicken cordon bleu and ending with rice pudding.

But food also makes her feel anxious, her list writing was a common occurrence at the soup kitchen, and on many occasions she would ask the table, or ask me “is salmon healthy... is cod liver oil good for you...?”. She told me several times that she had been told that she ate too much, or she would say “do you think I’m fat?” I would reassure her after another service user had commented on the amount that she ate. Eating for Cynthia often seemed urgent, and she would make her way through plates of doughnuts when there was a donation from Gregg’s. Her mental health problems left her very anxious about other people’s opinions of her and also her own health. She was also quite open and therefore would take the views offered her by different people to heart, even when they proved contradictory.

She would talk to me about the things you could buy from Holland and Barrett and their prices, she would ask people their favourite meals, she would keep on listing meals and foodstuffs, shopping lists extended beyond use. Above almost anything else, Cynthia wanted to become a chef. She wanted to work in a professional kitchen. Cynthia doesn’t work, and she is a person that would likely struggle to find employment; she openly discussed her medication and her diagnosis as paranoid schizophrenic. Once or twice whilst I and the other service users were eating or playing cards she would lift her head from her notebook and ask of one person or another “do you hate me Natalie?” apropos of nothing. I was very fond of Cynthia, and so were most of the other soup kitchen regulars, although sometimes they felt that she was taking liberties regarding her doughnut consumption.

One morning Cynthia told me that a person at another centre she visited had told her that she would never be able to be a chef. I was angry, I hated the idea that somebody was making Cynthia feel bad about her desires. Truthfully it was unrealistic that she would be able to hold down a job, but that didn’t matter, and also maybe she could? I felt conflicted about it, in one sense I felt she should be able to do whatever she wanted, in another I thought that the last thing anyone should want to have is a job.

7.3.3 Rituals of protection

When I first met Cynthia she was trying to secure some sellotape or glue to repair her bible which was falling apart from use. She was writing notes then too, prayers maybe, though I did not know her well enough to ask, it was my first day at the soup kitchen. The food lists were as incantatory as prayers, in fact their taxonomical exhaustiveness, and her interest in which things were good for you and which were not resemble Leviticus’ thorough guidance as to those animals which are clean to eat and those which are unclean. Were Cynthia’s lists to have been discovered by a scholar of the future they might interrogate the rhythms of her taxonomy in order to identify the systems that governed today’s food culture: “Peach cobbler, pear cobbler, apricot cobbler [would

a pineapple cobbler be nice?] pineapple cobbler, mango cobbler, apple cobbler, apple pie, banana pie, banoffee pie...”. As frustrating a text as Leviticus, that Mary Douglas called a “hoary old puzzle” (2002:51).

Douglas considers the analyses of Leviticus that claim various symbolic logics behind the prohibitions in that Old Testament text. Ultimately Douglas argues that those animals who were deemed improper to consume, are those who do not “conform fully to their class” (2002:68). In her list making Cynthia was grappling with the contemporary taxonomies of food which decide whether or not they are *good to eat*. Through her habitual listing of food Cynthia was writing her own Leviticus, one that was more useful in Holland & Barrett and Iceland. Cynthia struggled with mental health, and took the things that others said very seriously, this led at times to great distress.

Cynthia would often ask advice from me and other volunteers or service users about things that people had said as if she needed reassurance or help in attributing value to different things. Regarding food, she did not appear to have much guidance about it, and would repeat conflicting ideas. In her lists she appeared to be trying to systematise all the foods in a way that would give her power over this potent and important substance. Testing the limits of the cobbler or of chicken to try to understand how different foods combined and what was considered good and what was considered bad. In her lists, in her dreams of becoming a chef, of cooking the food served at the soup kitchen, she was subverting the idiom ‘beggars can’t be choosers’ by showing that she could discern, and aspiring to be able not only to choose but to create. In other words Cynthia was trying to navigate alienation through food, not in the ways that the mother and daughter did in the restaurant, aided by cultural power and a waiter, but through sheer intellectual effort. In her fantasy she had total control of the means of production and of the structures of knowledge that currently dominated her encounters with food. However, these dreams of control over and enjoyment of food were constantly challenged by those who used her physical and her mental health to distinguish between her ‘fantasy’ and the challenging reality of her life.

Natalie had a different encounter with food. When I knew her at the soup kitchen she no longer lived with her children, she had somehow lost contact or access to them due to her problems with addiction. Unlike Cynthia, who struggled to comprehend the power structures with which she had to grapple, Natalie was very wise to the realities of the world. Her canny and cynical approach to state power will be a feature of the next chapter. She found another way to negotiate her alienation from the means of production of food, she stole. The frankness with which she recalled the value of theft when seeking to feed a family healthy food, and the pleasure with which she then recalled the process of cooking and eating, was utterly unashamed. She enjoyed the laughter that her comments produced. Cost was limiting her access to food, and it was stopping her from being a chooser, including making choices which would promote the health of her family, so she chose without buying.

The idiom ‘beggars can’t be choosers’ is one that came to mind on numerous occasions at the soup kitchen. I remember on one occasion being in the kitchen taking out plates of cooked breakfast brought by a woman who ran a breakfast delivery business and looking up to see John looking through the window holding up his empty plate eager for some more food. We would often try to keep back some food for anybody that came in late, the other volunteer in there with me – an old hand, and a local youth worker, looked at him and complained about people taking liberties and I found myself agreeing with him. Other times when people complained about what they were being fed, I must admit that I did not take the smiling (if fake) customer is always right attitude which was the guiding principle of being a waiter. I am admitting to something that is shameful, that sometimes I found myself exasperated and exhausted by the needs of the service users. But my complaint was a cruel one, I was exasperated that those who had less power in society than I, were exercising their power over me. The idea of the beggar who chooses is abject, in the sense that it threatens the system which rewards the powerful with choice. Close attention to the phrase reveals an altogether less callous statement; it is not that beggars should not be choosers, but that they cannot, they are not able to choose.

7.4 Pizza and Chips

When I was first in London and living on Coldharbour Lane I read about Franco Manca in a newspaper, dutifully I went with my flatmate one weekend lunchtime and joined the queue that trailed out of Market Row and onto Electric Lane. We went back week after week, the cushiony chewy dough with just the right amount of charcoal blisters and the simple toppings were wildly novel to somebody who grew up in the era of the stuffed crust. At that time there were only two businesses in the markets actively trying to attract the attention of young middle class people like me, Rosie’s which I didn’t ever visit at the time, and Franco Manca. I remember the strangeness of queuing for as long as an hour while local people walked past looking askance at this weird image.

One woman once said loudly as she walked past “the pizza must be made of gold or something” and another occasion “it’s just posh cheese on toast you know”. There was real incredulity at the spectacle of so many middle class, largely white, people queuing in Market Row. Today it is par for the course. Going to Brixton was exciting, I felt like I was in a place that was not made for me, as a young privately educated white man I found myself fascinated by Brixton, weed sellers, cows heads and tripe in butchers, loud music, incense stores – for a naïve young man it fitted a somewhat racist fantasy of the other. Franco Manca was somewhere I could understand. I remember feeling very proud of having been an early customer of Franco Manca pizza, and quite protective over its reputation. For my peers and me it was a foothold in the neighbourhood, it was the business that undoubtedly paved the way for Brixton to become what it is today.

The cultural impact of the business was evident in the reactions of passers-by, the total astonishment and disapproval at the fuss being made over this pizza restaurant. Every Monday I would walk to Franco Manca with Laurie or another volunteer to pick up the pizzas for lunch. Waiting for the pizzas and chatting to the waiters at Franco Manca we were clearly out of place. However Franco Manca no longer seemed to me to be an outpost. The business was not vulnerable to the rest of Brixton. Laurie knew everyone in Brixton and as we walked along the street he would stop and wave and chat to people. But when we were waiting to collect the pizzas we would sit and chat awkwardly, he might go round the corner to say hi to a friend. In the street it was clear that I was very much in his neighbourhood, in the market I knew people that owned shops and worked in restaurants and his comfort in the place seemed to dwindle.

Laurie and I came to know each other well, we would talk about a wide range of topics on our weekly trips to the market. He had been an athlete but his career had been derailed in a way which he never described, more recently he had spent a spell in prison having been caught travelling with drugs. He had children, and he put much value on the fact that he still had a relationship with them. He had been born in Brixton and had lived in various places before returning to the area when he came out of prison. He was from a Caribbean family and he spoke to me about his affinity for Rastafarianism, as well as his interest in Christianity. I watched him become incredibly angry once when a woman who described herself as mixed race questioned the relevance of Africa to black Caribbeans, "I cannot listen to this kind of ignorance" in the end he shut down the conversation entirely.

At Franco Manca he spoke a little Italian with the staff, he had lived in Italy playing sport for a while when he was young. He was constantly looking around in case he saw people that he knew, once while we waited for the pizzas to be ready he wondered off to visit a Caribbean restaurant next door where he knew the owner to have a quick chat. I was never really brought into these conversations or introduced to anyone. On our way back we would pick up some chips from the chip shop over the road from the soup kitchen. We would chat to the owner while we waited for the chips to cook. Over the first couple of times we went there Laurie was able to establish that the chip shop owner's daughter had been to school with his children. Laurie looked for connections to the community wherever he could. Jimmy the chip shop owner would always cook the chips fresh for us, once or twice we asked him to get them ready to pick up on our way back but he was frustrated if we were late. The chips were all prepared from fresh potatoes chipped on the premises, he was rightly very proud of their quality. As such he did not like the chips to wait, but to be taken away fresh. While we waited for the chips to cook once I asked him about his business, he told me about the astronomical rents that were being demanded by landlords on the same road, a chicken shop had just been passed over to Soho House Group for a vast rent. He owned his shop and the building above, it was his family home, he did not want to give it up but he did not

have the money to invest to make it a more profitable business. He told me that only sit down restaurants made real money, because you could charge for alcohol, however he would have to spend many tens of thousands on his shop to make it a viable restaurant and he could not afford to do so. Meanwhile he scoffed at the prices being charged by the newly opened ‘Hip Hop Fish and Chip Shop’ on the corner of Atlantic Road, where one could eat fish and chips for £20 a head.

At the soup kitchen everyone loved the pizza, it would very often be the busiest lunchtime of the week. But there was no talk of sourdough or wood firing or organic ingredients. It was just delicious pizza. There was something very exciting about liberating pizza from the arena of discernment where I had consumed it so many times before and eating it in front of the T.V. talking about conspiracy theories or whatever the topic of the day happened to be. To save on washing up we would tear the pizza boxes in half and use them to serve half a pizza and a handful of chips. The chips were the final beautiful blow to the bubble of grandeur within which I had first consumed Franco Manca Pizzas back in 2009. There is something beautiful and radical about these ‘artisanal sourdough’ pizzas being served beside a pile of delicious chips. Transplanted from the restaurant and into the soup kitchen they are transformed from a signifier of sophistication to a more simple form of delicious sustenance.

7.5 The black carrot

One day in November there was a huge donation of vegetables from a wholesaler or something – I got there after it did. It was very fancy veg. Much of the veg was of the ‘heirloom’ or ‘heritage’ type – all shades of tomatoes and carrots. “I saw a black tomato” one person said, concerned that we had been delivered some very off produce. One carrot looked like a naked man below the waste, which was naturally hilarious. “I don’t want to eat a black tomato or a black carrot” Neil said, seemingly appalled by the whole idea – and even more so as I explained the kinds of prices that produce like this could command. Confronted by these vegetables I turned to the snippets of knowledge that I knew justified the wilful strangeness of the produce; that carrots were initially purple and bred to be orange by the Dutch, for example.

Many of the vegetables were almost thrown out as Neil had thought they had gone bad. To me, a frequenter of the farmers market, the unappetising colours of these vegetables were recognisable as a marker of what I had learned to consider quality. I felt so pretentious when I reflected on the vegetables, explaining to Neil why they were in fact prized and not off. I felt bad because I had been defending these vegetables from the

scepticism from Neil and others at the soup kitchen, and of course they were right. Why the hell would anyone agree to eat a black carrot?

Eating food is a risky encounter, as the young girl who came in to the restaurant understood. There are layers of mediation between the material quality of the food and the moment of tasting. At the soup kitchen the vegetables were not delivered with the claims that usually accompany them. Usually a black carrot is an authentic heritage carrot. Usually a black tomato is an 'heirloom tomato'. Waiters are another layer in this accumulation of language that separates the food from the eater and also safeguards against the uncanniness of food.

About halfway through my time at the restaurant the manager changed the vegetables. We used to get all of our veg from Nour cash and carry in Market Row. Mary decided we should have an organic veg supplier, suddenly our courgettes were yellow. The prices went up accordingly and we were being encouraged to upsell the vegetables on the basis of their organic credentials, especially if we had any complaints about smaller portions. You need to speak the language to navigate the copious claims made by food businesses.

7.6 Conclusion, Discernment and Alienation

In *Distinction* Bourdieu delineates the eating preferences of French society along class lines. The poorest in terms of cultural and economic capital focus on cheap and nourishing foods, the wealthier are divided by cultural capital – those with greater cultural capital focussing on lightness and healthiness and also the “exotic and recherché” (2010:186) whilst those with less cultural capital indulge in richer foods, but those which are more complex and refined than the food of the working classes. The richer eat more meat and fish while the poor largely eat more processed meats and carbohydrates. In the context of his research Bourdieu was able to make a highly essentialist argument by which the strong working bodies of the poor required heavy food to in contrast to “the professions” who seek more tasty and light food, he writes that “Taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, *embodied*, helps to shape the class body” (2010:190). In Brixton the relationship between food stuffs, bodies and class is not clean cut in this way.

In the case of the pizzas whilst the foodstuff itself does not change the language used to imbue it with significance does. A foodstuff claimed to be ‘authentic’ due to its relationship to cultural ideas such as ‘Italian-ness’ ‘organic-ness’ and ‘artisanship’ loses these associations as it is carried by Laurie and me from the restaurant to the soup kitchen. In this transition it ceases to become “exotic and recherché” (Bourdieu 2010:186) and becomes simply delicious nourishment. From pizza made of gold, to posh cheese on toast. If someone at Franco Manca were to open a bag of chips and put a handful beside their half-eaten pizza, the reaction from

staff and fellow customers would likely be one of disgust, this challenge to the expected system of consumption would verge on the abject. The chip shop owner could not afford to make the adaptations to his shop which would allow him to provide a new context in which people could consume his food, transforming them from mere chips into a slap up meal. In order to access the cultural systems within which one can make claims as to the value of a foodstuff one must have both economic and cultural capital to spare.

Viewed without their semantic gilding the black carrot and black tomatoes appeared simply as disgusting. They did not have the label of 'heirloom' to position their difference within a middle class food system. These are vegetables which commonly appear in food writing and restaurants which cater to the wealthy, but in the soup kitchen they appeared as mouldy. They did not meet the appearance expectations of good food and were hence classified as disgusting, they were not considered as things in themselves, not touched or sniffed, but due to the fact that they did not conform to a powerful taxonomic system they became disgusting again. Like the mother and daughter, these vegetables could be incorporated into a category of good food through talking and repetition. Cynthia's lists are perhaps just an outward manifestation of the ongoing lists we each maintain as to which foods are good and which foods are bad, they require repetitive maintenance in order to maintain this knowledge. However if you are wealthy it is easier to choose the foods you wish to consider good, it is simpler to form your own separate structures by which to protect yourself from the basic disgustingness of food. Beggars can't be choosers, although as in the case of Natalie, they can take a risk and circumvent capitalism and take what they need, although the full weight of the criminal law attempts to prevent such abject circumstances from occurring.

When these different structures of discernment come up against one another, as seen in the case of Debbie's reaction to the breakfast discussed above, or the daughter's disgust at the smell of the butcher next door – they produce acute experiences of disgust. I have discussed above some of the ways in which other academics have analysed these circumstances (Highmore 2008, Watson and Wells 2005, Rhys Taylor 2013b). As I have tried to demonstrate regarding the pizzas at the soup kitchen, a single foodstuff can carry vastly different meaning depending on the claims which are made about it. I have suggested above that disgust emerges as one becomes aware of the alienation which exists between individuals, commodities, the producers of commodities, and so on. When an infant moves away from the breast they must suffer the horror of the other as mediated through capitalism, it is at this point that they start to feel the profound isolation which exists between themselves, and for instance, a waiter in a restaurant in Brixton. Through rituals of protection such as those made visible in Cynthia's lists, or the calm persuasion of the mother speaking to her daughter, the dangers of consuming food produced by an alien other can be ameliorated. Notions of authenticity play a particular role here, as evidenced in Debbie's desire for "proper" breakfast, notions of properness and goodness are established through careful

structures of semantic claims. I wish to suggest that there remain glimpses of an un-alienated authenticity within processes of eating, and in this a radical challenge to dominant forms of consumption.

“The speaking tongue kills the tasting tongue” says Michel Serres (2008:186). The Pizza from Franco Manca is just pizza at the soup kitchen, consumed on Market Row it is ‘sourdough’ it is ‘organic’ it is ‘I came here when it first opened’ it is ‘not as good as Theo’s’. At the soup kitchen it is food, to be tasted and enjoyed, sustenance and pleasure. To negotiate disgust we turn to speech like the mother and daughter in the Restaurant, it takes work to learn how to enjoy food – properly. However in the generation of description that accompanies this effort, perhaps the ability to taste is diminished. The apparent authenticity of the object gives us the confidence to consume it, however it also limits our ability to enjoy the authenticity of encounter.

Sometimes at the soup kitchen people would ask for more, or they would ask for something different. I know that I wasn’t the only volunteer who ever cruelly albeit momentarily thought ‘beggars can’t be choosers’. In this chapter I hope to have suggested that the discourse that surrounds food, and notions of discernment are a way to negotiate disgust at the otherness of food. However I have also suggested following Serres (2008) that in this speech the actual sensory encounter with food is reduced to text. The phrase ‘beggars can’t be choosers’ states that those without power over what they eat, and those who do not have enough are not able to be discerning. It tends to imply that beggars should not be choosers. I have also tried to identify the ways in which discernment produces alienation. At the soup kitchen where often food usually produced for the middle classes is channelled towards the socially marginalised there is a radicalness in the act of eating Franco Manca pizza, because when the sensory signs are not signifiers of authenticity or cultural capital the sensations are simply permitted to produce pleasure.

8. Playing Cards & Conspiracy Theories

8.1. Introduction

I spent 6 months playing cards, drinking tea, eating pizza several times a week at the soup kitchen. I would chat to service users, many of whom I got to know quite well. I told the same people again and again that I was writing a PhD – few people cared. Sometimes I forgot I was writing my PhD, I would just go and hang out, it filled my days and I enjoyed spending time with people I liked and people who knew me. Sometimes if I was late, or if I had missed a usual day some of the service users would complain. I helped people apply to jobs and appeal parking tickets, I learned about people's addictions and their mental health issues. But I do not think that this is the consequence of my methodology, or my personality, the soup kitchen was a place full of openness and generosity. It was founded out of solidarity and the first lesson I was given as a volunteer is that ideally I would not be immediately distinguishable from service users. Of course this was not to deny the power relations that existed between volunteer and service user, or even researcher and everyone else at the soup kitchen, but what it did mean was sitting at the table with everyone else and letting Laurie beat you at cards 9 times out of 10, every day.

The service users at the soup kitchen are among the most socially alienated in society, they were excluded from 'mainstream' society at almost every turn. As I have suggested already (section 5.5.) Brixton has been a space that has accommodated the outsider, but this was changing, and the people I met at the soup kitchen were keenly aware. I will suggest in this chapter that the alienation of the marginalised is produced by the state as well as the movements of the property market that have transformed Brixton. The daily game-like interactions between individual and the state produce a sense of extreme perception, and the responses to society appeared at first heightened and irrational. At the soup kitchen service users could speak without fear of judgement, during my fieldwork I made efforts not to categorise the political speech that happened there as irrational or otherwise aberrant. Consequently I found that speech that might otherwise too readily have been dismissed represented a political voice which would otherwise be dismissed.

At the soup kitchen I was privileged to meet and learn from some of the people in society who are most marginalised, most oppressed, and in the context of this PhD – most alienated from society. As a naïve and sometimes idealistic middle-class white male, educated at posh schools, who grew up in the home counties, the time John and Frances arrived and announced to the room that they had not taken crack for three days to a round of applause I was taken aback. I was meeting people that had been faceless figures in my politics: the homeless, the drug addicted, the ex-convicts, the victims of abuse, the mentally ill, and in doing so I was learning

that these terms were utterly incapable of fully representing the lives of those who I met. The soup kitchen was not arranged in line with sociological categories, and neither would any service user neatly reproduce the stereotype most closely resembling their life history. The soup kitchen was a space of safety and support, it was somewhere that people were open about the near impossible situations that many of the service users faced, and they could advise and understand each other in a way that I could not. I slowly began to learn how to speak to people un-mediated by the tabloid categories which I associated with them, much as service users spoke to each other. The openness with which people spoke in the space, and the long conversations and games I was fortunate to enjoy there have led me to take care in changing names, occupations, geographical details and so on with the hope of providing anonymity to the many people I met, some of whom I had the opportunity to fully describe my research to, and some of whom I did not.

When I stopped visiting the soup kitchen for research at the end of 2015 I swore that I would return as a volunteer, but I've not been back, and I feel guilty. Whilst I did not find it a chore being there, there was a level of emotional labour which I did not immediately account for. The fact that I have not been back should serve to underline that however friendly I felt with the people I was learning about, I was never their friend – and I am sure they were never under this impression either. I hope that in the detailed observations I am able to describe in this chapter that I can make an accurate representation of the soup kitchen. In this chapter I will describe the card games that were played at the soup kitchen and use this as a start point for a discussion about the relationship between service users and the state. I will also explore the political speech at the soup kitchen, in particular the conspiracy theories which were a regular feature of discussions about society. I will conclude by relating the material in this chapter to the thesis' overarching themes, alienation and authenticity. I will suggest that the apparent irrationality of conspiracy theories might be seen as a mechanic of alienation, and that if we listen to this speech before dismissing it it could open up an arena from which authentic political interventions could be made from the margins of society.

8.2 *Punitive space?*

The circumstances that brought service users to the soup kitchen were often complex, issues trailing as far back as their early childhoods, however all of them had stories to tell about their interactions with the state. Whether it was job sanctions, changes to their benefit eligibility, imprisonment or otherwise, most at the soup kitchen had had an interaction with the state that had contributed to their need for the soup kitchen. The soup kitchen was not an ideological institution, it aimed straightforwardly to provide food, company and support for those who needed it. It was also notably not a religious space, many similar spaces were run by churches. It was (and remains) entirely independent from the state in terms of funding and management, though the founders had

built good relationships with institutions across Brixton. As an institution it held an ambiguous position, and this ambiguity helped it accommodate the complex lives and needs of its service users.

Neil Smith's powerful notion of the revanchist city casts state treatment of the homeless as a matter of revenge, of re-claiming the streets for the wealthy, often through violence (2012). He describes "a vicious reaction against minorities" that characterised the policies that governed the city (Neil Smith 2012:207). He is largely writing about a specific era in New York City's municipal governance, however London has seen cruel anti-homeless measures in recent years such as 'anti-homeless spikes' (Quinn 2014). The violence involved in the policing of the poor in London is evident, and it was directly observable during my time carrying out fieldwork at the soup kitchen in Brixton. However it does not provide an adequate framework for an account of the complexity and insidiousness of the relationship that the service users I met had with the state.

Geoff deVerteuil has suggested that an alternative notion might better describe the way in which the homeless in particular are treated by the local state. In his research based in Los Angeles he proposes that "poverty management" (de Verteuil 2006:118) better accommodates the neoliberal collaboration between the state and other institutions to provide shelter for the homeless which he argues "reduce homeless visibility" (2006:119). The grim bureaucracy of this vision chimes in some ways with my observations in Brixton of the way that the government treated the very poor through the job centre, however his strategic framework allows minimal space for the tactics I observed.

Cloke, Johnsen and May's *Swept up Lives* (2011) discusses what they call day centres, places where people in need can drop in for food and also enjoy a communal space and other services; a category the soup kitchen fits into. They speak about the diverse service users that attended the day centres where their ethnographic research was based, and importantly, how accommodating of difference such spaces tended to be (2011:131). Whilst the soup kitchen was sometimes a space of bickering and disagreement tempers were rarely raised very high and tensions were often defused by one person simply moving within the room or leaving altogether; somewhat similar to Cloke, Johnsen and May's observation that service users would self-police (2011:136). Like the soup kitchen these places did not solely provide to the homeless but to those in need. Cloke, Johnsen and May recognise that some homeless services have accepted a "system of neo-liberal governance", others might better be conceived of as a response to revanchism rather than an agent of it (2011:146). The soup kitchen in Brixton occupied an ambiguous position, it was based in a building which it had been allowed to use by the council, however it received no funding at all, instead the founders had become adept at soliciting funding from businesses and charities. Marks & Spencer, Citibank and Nando's had all made major donations of food, money, or both. It had also been aided in the transformation of its home by ITV and the television show *Surprise! Surprise!* Whilst this absence of state-funding and the constant work to find new sources of donations were

serious problems for the soup kitchen, it did also ensure a kind of informal quality to the encounters there which seemed to help create a comfortable space for service users and volunteers alike.

8.3 The rules of blackjack

Cards is a big thing at the soup kitchen, it took me a long time to learn the subtleties of the game, but now I am a half decent Blackjack player. The first time someone invited me to play I thought they meant Pontoon, or 21, but the Blackjack played at the soup kitchen is a vastly different, and vastly superior game. It is something everyone seems to know how to play, I infer from various conversations that it is a game that you play growing up in the Caribbean community. Newcomers usually knew how to play the game, particularly if they were black or had grown up in Brixton. Jay and Laurie were the great masters of the game. “Jacks on twos and queens a slag” was the way the house rules would be summarised for newcomers – this meant that a two – which forced the next player to pick up two cards unless they had a two of their own could also have a jack played on it – a black jack means the next player picks up five, these cards worked cumulatively so it was quite possible to end up having to pick up ten cards or more. Winning the game required a ruthless tactical nouse, the best players were able to string their opponents along before delivering the killing blow, on many days it seemed that Jay could simply win at will. Most of the conversations I had with people at the soup kitchen came during games of cards, or sometimes chess. The hours I spent playing round after round of Blackjack constituted true intellectual exertion.

Most people would play cards from time to time, but for some of us it was a pursuit that was taken deadly seriously, sometimes played in silence, sometimes whilst we discussed things, other times interspersed with trash talk. Natalie would come in every Monday morning and play cards on her way to meet with her housing officer. She was trying to get re-housed in advance of going into rehab – her hope was that the new environment would help her stay clean. Natalie was a drinker, or at least as far as I could understand, many of the people at the soup kitchen had suffered multiple addictions throughout their lives. For Natalie a game of cards was what she said she needed to sharpen her wits before she went to “stick it to the man”. Undoubtedly, even when she’d had a drink, she could still be a formidable opponent.

Seven cards each, if you have more than four or five players you can use two packs of cards. If there are only two of you take eleven cards each. The dealer turns over the top card and the player to their left goes first, though if someone doesn’t know this then don’t make too much of a fuss about it. You must follow suit or rank when you play on the card on top of the pile, the aim is to get rid of all of your cards, you can play runs or twos, threes, fours of a kind. You can build up long chains and play them all at once, being able to do this is what marks a good player out from a merely lucky player. For example if the first card is a three of hearts the

next player could play a three of clubs, a four of clubs and a four of hearts. There are a number of magic cards which you can use to effect your opponents play. These cards were usually rattled off quickly to remind players who were rusty. Something like this ‘twos – pick up two, black jacks pick up five, red jacks cancel it. Eight skip a go, King reverse it, Ace changes suit and Queen is a slag’. The Queen is the key card in the game, when you play a Queen you must cover it with another card, and it can be any card you want (hence her being a slag). When it comes to building long chains of cards to play the Queen is an essential way to extend these chains because if you can play say ten Jack Queen, you can then start a whole new chain on top of the Queen. This was Jay’s incredible skill, he would look into his hand and always find a way to play a chain of cards, when many others would go turn after turn being forced to play single cards Jay would always find a way.

Blackjack is a vindictive game, you need a killer instinct, you have to be prepared to use your Jacks and twos in combination to ruin the games of your opponents; if someone plays one of these cards the only way you can avoid having to pick up is by playing another one yourself, this works cumulatively so with one pack of cards one can end up having to pick up 18 cards at once. In particularly competitive games, which most of them were, there are also severe penalties for making mistakes, “one for revealing, two for mistake” Jay or Laurie would say, bang to rights. There were few arguments, we all abided by the rules, and I would keep playing even as I was beaten time and again, once ten times in a row by Matthew.

In order to win at Blackjack you needed to anticipate malice and deal it out yourself, you had to anticipate the moves of your competitors and plan carefully how you would play your hand. However you could still end up being punished, if one had won too many times often your opponents would conspire to ruin your luck. Even the best players could end up with fistfuls of cards. That said one of the great thrills of the game was finding yourself with a hand of twenty or thirty cards and having the firepower to control the rest of the game and win in the face of adversity.

8.4 Playing the game

Games play an important role in social development. The dynamics of games and gameplay are commonly referenced when referring to the techniques of everyday life. Roger Caillois wrote one extensively about the sociology of play in *Man, Play & Games* (2001 [1958]). In this book he responds to Huizinga’s familiar thesis, that human society can be defined by the importance it places upon game play – coining the term *Homo Ludens* (1949), developing and modifying the notion that human society is formed *through* the playing of games. Caillois identifies an important tension in the role of games in society, that they are on one hand the product of childish impersonation of adult life, and on the other hand the preoccupation of adults themselves (2001:63). Caillois

indicates the relationship between games and ‘reality’ vividly in an illustration which shows how the four aspects of gameplay which he identifies: “competition... chance ... simulation... vertigo” can be seen in the marginal cultural forms of games, in institutional society and in ‘anti-social’ behaviours which he terms “corruption” (2001:54). He suggests that “chance”, for instance, can be seen in casinos, stock market speculation, and in superstition and astrology (which he somewhat strongly classes as ‘corruption’!). The point is that the skills required in game playing are called upon in multiple aspects of ‘real life’.

However, games should not be reduced to social pedagogy, they also provide a means to escape from the realities of the world and to enjoy a fantasy life where one is gifted with extraordinary powers and can return from cataclysmic lows. Winnicott relates play explicitly to what he terms “Transitional Objects” (1971:1-34) in so doing he argues that play is an essential part of making the tricky distinction between self and other, discussed already in chapter 7. In play the child brings their dream-world into relation with external phenomena and “invests chosen external phenomenon with dream meaning and feeling” (Winnicott 1971:69). Winnicott argues that this makes play a psychologically precarious activity due to the interplay between “that which is subjective (near-hallucination) and that which is objectively perceived (actual, or shared reality)” (1971:70). Winnicott argues then that there is both a social and a dream aspect to play – in that in playing we begin to grapple with the dissonance between our internal lives and external phenomena.

In this chapter I will go on to suggest that the relationship between some of the service users at the soup kitchen and the state had game-like dynamics. They relied on chance, skill, cunning, and so on – yet in the case of dealings with the state the power dynamic never favoured the marginalised. At the soup kitchen the card table was a space where even someone who did not really understand the game could occasionally win – with the odd bit of guidance from the person sitting beside them. Political conversations often occurred whilst we were playing cards, though this was admittedly much of the time, but one thing that a game of cards is is an experiment in power and competence, it is a space in which one can explore dreams of pure empowerment and control. For Natalie Monday card games were an opportunity to sharpen her wits in a dream environment before she applied them to a gruelling bureaucratic exchange with the state.

The notion of ‘playing the game’ in relation to bureaucracy is a familiar one, in the following section I will recount some of the game-like (but not fun) exchanges endured with the state by some of the service users at the soup kitchen. Part of play is the interaction between self and other; and as Winnicott has identified – this is a precarious enterprise, one based on fine distinctions (1971:69). When your opponent appears to act against you, but also appears to know your cards it is enough to unsettle the interplay between internal dream and external reality, it can produce painful and troubling results. When the cards are stacked against you, but you

cannot see why, of course you begin to fear that your opponent is cheating, but how can you prove it when you are not allowed to know the rules.

8.5 Precarious games with the state

Natalie spent months trying to find her new house, when she was at the soup kitchen she was hilarious and wry as hell. She used to call me “Mr Sam”. She has a degree, she grew up in South Africa, she had had children and lived with them, but now she was alone – and she couldn’t see them. When she was finished with rehab she came in while she was getting ready to finally move house. She was struggling to get the money together to rent a van to move her stuff. One thing I learned time and again at the soup kitchen is that getting clean is an achievement, staying clean is not guaranteed, but it is still worthy of celebration. Her first few weeks of sobriety it became much easier to see her wit and intelligence, her personality as cynical, but also hopeful. However the next time I saw her she seemed low, she was talking about her life in her new flat, “this is my boring sober life now, until I die” – she said.

Johnny & Nicola came in for the first time in September, they needed food desperately. Their benefits payments had been delayed for the second time due to administrative errors so they had now been more than six weeks without money. Their flat had an electricity meter which their landlord was responsible for – instead of making them actually pay coin by coin he let them pay him monthly. However, they still needed a pound coin to make the power run – and they didn’t even have that. They would dodge fares on trains to get to the soup kitchen. Johnny had had a job, cooking on a market stall for one day a week, however he was told that because it was so few hours it was impossible for him to pay his rent and he would have to give it up in order to claim benefits.

Johnny had been a footballer, he had played semi-professionally, having initially been scouted by a first division team and trained with them for a while he had ultimately been demoted to playing the odd game for £50-100. This ended when he had a fight on the pitch. To cap it all he was diabetic and as they had no working fridge in which to store his insulin. Fortunately he was able to get a job after a week or two of coming to the soup kitchen, I didn’t see them again until December. When they did come in again the situation had taken a serious turn for the worse, the fight that had ended his footballing career had resulted in court proceedings, two years after the incident. Johnny was sent to prison. Nicola had gotten a job at Subway, but she was made redundant after four weeks. She was left having to sign on once again and somehow find a way to survive the intervening months. “How can you be made redundant by Subway” she said – drolly.

If you fail to turn up to appointments at the Jobcentre or refuse to participate in a work placement one can find oneself penalised. Benefits are suspended for people in these situations for an amount of time that varies depending on the apparent severity of the crime. For those that face these sanctions the soup kitchen is one of the last remnants of the safety net that you have already partly fallen through. In a twist of fate however, the soup kitchen was also a place that one could be given a work placement. After the soup kitchen founders agreed that they would take one or two people on placement when they needed help they found themselves being sent six or seven people on work placement. These were people in receipt of benefits who were being made to work for no money, this 'voluntary' position is intended to improve one's employment prospects. If any of these work placements had found themselves falling foul of the sanctioning regime they would have likely found themselves needing to come as a service user instead of a 'volunteer'. There was actually very little work to do for them and as such they would largely sit around; had they not been attending they may well have found themselves returning to the soup kitchen – but this time as a service user.

Carl has gotten a parking fine, he asks me a favour, he wants to appeal against the fine and asks me to write his appeal for him. After lunch I sit down with him and we try to come up with a lie. Harry gets involved in the process too, he has previously helped Carl in the same way. Carl has an idea: he suggests that we say that he was saving a woman from a rape – before I work out how to respond to this suggestion Harry steps in and points out that they would be able to check it. Then Carl says that his mother has been terribly ill, the truth is far more convincing than the lie. We construct a story together, he had to go to the chemists to pick up an important prescription for his mother, he was rushing and he was upset and he forgot to check the signs before he pulled over. Parking fines are incredibly expensive, particularly if, like Carl your income is low and unstable. I don't feel like I'm lying when I write that emotional and financial stress will make it incredibly difficult to pay the fine. Carl is really close to his mum, she has stuck by him through drug addiction and illness. We talk about how strong our mothers are, Carl's sadness is painful, we look each other in the eye. Any initial hesitance to help him appeal his parking fine is utterly trumped by this. There is no fucking way that he should have to pay this fine.

James told the story of his arrest: he had realised the police were going to search him so he swallowed the packet of drugs that he had with him, presumably to sell, but he choked on them. The policeman saved his life, performing the Heimlich manoeuvre on him and sending the drugs flying. James finds himself on the floor within reach of the drugs and is reaching for them when the policeman hauls him up and throws him against the car, James is laughing all the way through this story. At that point, in the face of the policeman's violence he decides that the policeman deserves the credit and the arrest. His life saved and his life ruined in the same instant.

These were the games that people at the soup kitchen were playing with the state. Nobody won. You had to anticipate the moves of your opponents. You had to be suspicious of every move that they might make. Like the card game you had to be prepared to be stung – unlike the card game, even the best players could not prevent the counterattack. The repetitive and combative nature of the game was even directly employed by Natalie to prepare herself for the experience of grappling with the machinery of the state. It was commonly the backdrop for conversations about the lives of the service users and their views about society and politics. The main difference being that no one at the soup kitchen ever won in their games with the state.

8.6 Conspiracy theories

Nissim was talking about Palestine, and then he was talking about Jewish people and the Holocaust, and then he started telling nobody in particular that the Holocaust had not killed as many people as they think. We are eating lunch, it is July and I've not been coming to the soup kitchen for very long. Nissim makes me feel uneasy, not just because of the Holocaust denial, he enjoys courting controversy and the uneasy effect it has on those he talks to. It is hard to work out the best way to moderate the comments of people at the soup kitchen. Many of the service users had experienced mental health and addiction problems, I didn't feel comfortable in 'correcting' the things that people were saying. However, open anti-semitism made me feel very uncomfortable, but just as I was preparing to intervene Carl did so first. Carl said that of course the Holocaust happened, there is lots of evidence that proves it did. Then he said, what's happening now is that FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) camps in America are preparing to start killing people on the same scale. I was grateful to Carl for correcting Nissim, but more importantly I was relieved that Carl did not reveal himself to be anti-semitic himself. In the past he had spoken about conspiracy theories, including those surrounding the Rothschild family, who are Jewish. Conspiracy theories were a common discussion at the soup kitchen, they were brought up by many people and woven through discussions about current affairs and politics. The first time I heard somebody bring up a conspiracy theory I felt very uneasy. It had been something that Carl said, probably to do with FEMA camps as it was a favourite topic. But as time passed and I became closer to the service users at the soup kitchen and came to comprehend the difficult relationship that many of them had had with authority and the state, I decided to start treating conspiracy theories differently. In the following example the way in which such marginal talk was connected with local politics made its importance even clearer.

I was explaining my PhD to Doreen when James jumped in excitedly. It is October. "The thing with Brixton is, it keeps changing, it always keeps changing, it did in the 1950s it did before, it will change again. We stay in the same place and the world changes around us because the world is round. Everything is a circle." Carl joins in

agreeing about the circular history thesis. He has a bleaker view, he cites the new world order, FEMA (federal emergency management agency) camps in the United States, stacks of coffins stockpiled to accommodate mass killings. James is very animated – “the world doesn’t care about us we’re new here, land used to be sea and will be sea again. Brixton will change but its still got soul.” Carl says gentrification relates to drug money. James says every shop in the arcades is new. “It’s criminal money” says James. James says sure but it has always been criminal money, money from slavery and other crimes. Everything changes but everything stays the same. James is hyper and he seems to have even overwhelmed Carl who more commonly launches into such extended political diatribes. There is something baffling about James’s narrative but there is a shining and incisive political insight in it. His radical but somewhat nihilistic view of history – things will keep on changing, we’ll just sit back and laugh.

Carl talks to me for a while after this about the New World Order, chem trails, the Rothschilds, various other familiar conspiracy tropes. But at the same time he makes a careful analysis of economics making a capitalism is crisis analysis. “They already have power”, he says, “they already have money, they want total control. They want to reduce the population to 600 million.” He believes the crisis is in the interest of the rich and will invite them to tag everyone with RFID (radio frequency identification) chips to monitor our movement and permit privileges. He asks me – “would you take the chip?” If there is a choice then no, I say. “What can we do to stop this happening”, I ask him, “nothing”, he says.

Paul turns up crying, I’m sitting on the sofa with Carl. He smells very bad mainly of alcohol and body odour. I try to get him to sit down but just before he does Jay intervenes – “No!!” – it transpires that Paul has shit himself, so we guide him back downstairs. A volunteer is cleaning the stairs as we go down. Later on I find out that while he was outside with Mo and Jacob, who both wore gloves, he told them that he had seen somebody die. When I ask Mo later about Paul he reflects on the way that his drinking has made it hard for us volunteers to get to know him. Next time I see Paul he is a reduced force, more sober, more sad. His dress sense becomes more conservative, he had tended to dress in hippy tee shirts, scruffy hair, sandals or flip flops. When he next is back in the soup kitchen his hair is combed and he has a job at the newsagent. It is hard to know what to make of the sobriety of people you’ve gotten to know whilst they were wasted.

Had I not spent the time I did at the soup kitchen I would have read the events described above very differently. The gap between the story in July and the story in October is a significant one. Initially presented by the speech and behaviour of the people I came to know I often responded with feelings of horror. It felt impossible to engage with people who were speaking in the extreme ways that they were. Conspiracy theories, aberrant speech, extreme behaviour were all too simple to dismiss as the unhinged ramblings of the marginalised. However from my first visit to the soup kitchen Mo, Jacob, Jay and other regular volunteers made it abundantly clear that as a

volunteer I should try to listen and speak to the service users in a way that reduced the social distance between us. When Mo walked into the soup kitchen during my first morning there he told me that they aimed for a space in which it was hard to distinguish between service users and volunteers. I had to learn to stop flinching internally at conspiracy theory, violence, criminality, drugs; not that these were by any means definitive of the conversations that occurred at the soup kitchen, however it was new to me. I didn't know how to respond when John and Frances came in carrying towels to wipe away withdrawal symptom sweat and announced they'd been clean for three days. At the soup kitchen this was not a shocking statement, the other service users congratulated them and even cheered a little when they said that they had told a dealer to fuck off that morning.

It is not that I came to tolerate or gloss over the speech and events that constituted the everyday at the soup kitchen, but that I became more fluent in them. I learned from the other service users that shock and horror was not a useful response. It was because of this that I began to treat these events not as glamorous horror stories, but as events and conversations that I could respond to and engage with. In particular with regard to conspiracy theories and other extreme speech I made a conscious decision not to treat these as aberrant but to engage with them as I would with any political statement from someone I was speaking with. It is in this way that the radical politics of the margins became partly legible.

8.7 Chess

Harry was an anomaly at the soup kitchen, and he made it very clear that he considered himself an anomaly. Harry had grown up feeling out of place, born into a wealthy black family he had made and lost several fortunes. He had been an accountant to the very wealthy and would occasionally drop the names of celebrities. Harry was always ready to offer his sage advice regarding the dealings that other service users had with institutions, he was wise to the way such things worked. He would visit Brixton in his younger days “to be black for the weekend, go to shebeens and smoke spliff, spend a few nights with a white girl then go back”. He said he always went back to Brixton when things went wrong, so that was why he was there now. He told me that if he were to write a PhD it would be about social displacement, the term he used to describe his predicament – being a black man who knew wealth, having grown up in a white neighbourhood, never quite having had a place. Harry had had to learn how to be black and he had schooled himself in Brixton.

Harry and I had a competitive series of chess games, we would play once or twice a week. Initially we were fairly evenly matched but soon I began to beat him consistently. At times it would make him edgy, but the intellectual challenge of the game was satisfying enough not to dishearten him. Harry is a determined man, and he is clearly not one to give up. While I knew him at the soup kitchen he confided in me, though in the vaguest

terms, his plans to re-establish his fortune through a new financial consultancy business. Just a few more letters to write – he would say – I’m getting it all in place, before long I should be very rich again. He told me that he would still come to the soup kitchen, he would still keep his life humble, that he would make anonymous donations to the soup kitchen. Harry once used chess as a metaphor for his predicament “get through the next few weeks, stay alive to threats and hopefully get to the endgame”.

During one game of chess James comes to join us in an energetic mood. He asks us whether we agree that the Conservative government were directly attacking the working class, “I can’t help feeling like it’s a conspiracy” he said. That week a woman had laid into the Tory tax credit policy on *Question Time* (BBC 2015) he was clearly effected by her distress. Though, as the woman in question had been a Tory voter, he said “it’s their fault really, they voted for them.” I point out that there had been a promise not to cut tax credits. “I don’t understand why working class people vote for them ... I don’t care though really, I don’t work”. We all laugh at this. Harry is concerned about the notion that Tories are directly going after the poor. He sees the Tories as being good at looking after economy. His argument is that Tories are naïve and don’t understand the realities of being poor, “they need to get people like that in their cabinet, in more prominent positions”. James is listening carefully – “but why aren’t those people getting into the cabinet – there are working class people in the Tory party – that’s the conspiracy”. This gives Harry pause for thought, he had been taking the position of moderate versus James’ extremism, at this point though he concedes the point – from this perspective he can appreciate James’ view that there is a conspiracy of sorts to keep the working classes from positions of power in the government. This careful discussion exposed the logical flaws on either side of the argument, and each position relied on the assumption that somebody in power held secret knowledge. Harry’s more establishment view seemed likely to win the day, however James’ patient argument led Harry to concede some ground to a view that would have been easily disregarded.

The documentary *Bobby Fisher Against the World* (2011) suggests that Fisher’s later descent into anti-Semitism and conspiracy theory fuelled mania was directly connected to his genius as a chess player. To be excellent at chess one must anticipate every possible attack against oneself, one must be vigilant to the point of paranoia. Surviving on the margins of society requires a similar extreme perception of threat. When there are aspects of society that truly are attempting to monitor and discipline you at every step you take, it is surely understandable that one would suspect the state of having secret intentions. The discussions that came up about conspiracy theories at the soup kitchen were not limited to those who displayed paranoiac tendencies, many, including Harry who made efforts to represent himself as the fountainhead of rationality at the soup kitchen, expressed their sympathies and comprehension of views that would be considered “crazy” in the mainstream.

8.8 *The production of irrational subjects*

I want to argue that conspiracy theories are a form of political speech that have particular traction amongst the people I knew at the soup kitchen because of the precariousness in which they live. The game-like relationship that they are forced into with the state creates and exploits a tenuous balance between internal life and external world (Winnicott 1971:69). Another way of describing this gap between the self and the other is alienation. When one has one's benefits removed via sanction because of a spell in hospital and you need to get food from a soup kitchen, or when one is volunteering at a soup kitchen to avoid sanction, the state is interfering with not just one's capacity to be productive, but one's very means of social reproduction. The state of precariousness in which people at the soup kitchen lived created a gulf between their internal lives and their actions in the external world. Many of them had their ability to be in the world severely and repeatedly obstructed by mechanics such as probation, work placements and benefit sanctions. The magnitude of punitive measures were clearly arbitrary and limited peoples' ability to be autonomous and productive in their own lives. Such measures confiscate the means of social production and severely restrict the possibility of acting authentically in the world.

It would be simple to disregard the accounts of surveillance and fear of mass death as the ramblings of the addicted and afflicted; but to do so is to disregard a voice from the edge of society. I hope that those reading the account I have made of the conspiracy theories that were spoken at the soup kitchen can identify that such speech makes its own point, beyond being a mere subject of study. I want to argue that conspiracy theories are a political speech that emerges from the most alienated individuals in society. If alienation is, as I have already suggested, a condition of present day society, and we start looking for conspiracy-like thinking across all political speech it is possible to see that the value attributed to different political narratives is not a purely scientific assessment of facts but a measure of the cultural power held by those who are drawing the narratives.

A conspiracy theory is a way of explaining experience, just as anyone thinking politically is involved in a form of theory making. Anita Waters has called conspiracy theories "ethnosociologies [...] theories that ordinary people use to explain social phenomena" (1997:114). It is a way of comprehending the relationship between oneself and the external world. Gentrification is itself a form of conspiracy theory; there is an implication that there are secret actions taken by the rich and the powerful to transform neighbourhoods into more valuable assets. Lance Freeman has said it resembles a conspiracy that has "just enough truth to make it credible" (2011:118). Discussion of a conspiracy theory would commonly stem from discussion of the way that Brixton itself was changing. To simply dismiss the political speech on the margins as false makes the tacit assertion that the political speech in the media, or by academics, is made based only on facts, and never inference, supposition, or imagination. In the current political climate of 'fake news' and the mainstreaming of paranoid thought it

seems particularly dangerous to dismiss conspiracy theory as deranged ramblings without considering what experiences such speech might be reflecting.

Writing about the American Civil War and conspiracies relating to slavery D.B Davis directly related the power of conspiracy theories to periods of “turbulent social mobility” which create “a yearning for authenticity, spontaneity, and naturalness” (1969:28 cited in Waters 1997:115). He suggests that there is something perversely heartening about the contrast of one’s own authenticity with the “artifice of an antagonist” (1969:29). This aligns with the suggestion that I am trying to make here, that the social conditions which were being endured by those whom I came to know at the soup kitchen produced an acute desire to make sense of how they relate to the world. In her paper Waters is exploring the thesis that black people are particularly engaged in conspiracy theory. She finds that those who profess belief in conspiracy theories are more likely to have recently experienced racial abuse (1997:118), they are also likely to be politically engaged and better educated (1997:121). We can infer from this that a belief in conspiracy theories is often a response to experiences of persecution and the product of an attempt to make sense of the political context in which such violence happens. Whilst it is the case that many of those I spoke to about conspiracy theories were black, this is hardly surprising as many at the soup kitchen were black, and many of the white service users also engaged in such conversations. I can be certain that issues of race and racism were a part of some of these conspiracies, and more importantly that all of those who did engage in such conspiratorial talk had experienced persecution in some way – though this was hardly a distinguishing feature.

However this is not a response that was limited to the service users at the soup kitchen, and there are mainstream forms of political speech which share characteristics with ‘conspiracy theory’ but are not given the short shrift that the kind of discussions recounted in this chapter might be. For instance, the fear expressed by my boss about the London Black Revolutionaries’ march through the market, and the insinuation that the market was a space effected by racism was treated with great suspicion (see section 5.9). She flirted with a narrative of her own persecution as a white business person in Brixton at the same time casting the notion that the black community were being persecuted in the way that the market had been developed as hyperbole. Her exaggerated narrative shared characteristics with the conspiracy theories at the soup kitchen, yet due to the cultural power Mary holds it would never be termed as such. Returning to Waters’ notion of the ethnosociology, all aspects of society are involved in some way with creating narratives to explain the world with access to incomplete facts; but those who are most maligned and persecuted are more likely to have their explanatory narratives dismissed as mere conspiracy.

I am not interested in making a claim here about the veracity or otherwise of the theories put forward in the discussions recounted in this chapter, but rather to look at the ways in which such narratives emerge and are

treated. Conspiracy theories are a form of political speech that attempt to grapple with the acute social alienation experienced by the people I knew at the soup kitchen. They emerge to explain a society in which individuals on the edge of society are consistently denied control over the way that they live in the world. Apparently irrational thinking is at least in part an outcome of a precarious game-like relationship with the state, one which unsettles the relationship between self and other. The card game might be seen as a fantasy image of a society where control over one's own situation is possible and advantage is doled out according to chance not birth, one's lot replenished every round, it is an opportunity to imagine a more equitable – though still brutal – relationship between self and other. Faced with the challenge of explaining why the lives of service users at the soup kitchen are so full of disadvantage, persecution, oppression, and alienation, conspiratorial narratives are a means to explain the inexplicable. How else could one respond to the realisation that the games you play are more fair than the life you live. The very conditions of the lives of the service users at the soup kitchen directly produced a political language that responds directly to injustice. These social conditions produce a voice which is most easily dismissed as irrational. In this way a political subjecthood which appears incoherent from a mainstream perspective is produced. Perhaps because to acknowledge that the suffering of the most alienated parts of society cannot be easily explained, at least not in terms of rules and justice, undermines the very notion that there is a rational order to society as a whole.

8.9. Medicine

I was busy talking to Cynthia about films, her favourite is either *Midnight Express* or *Midnight Cowboy*, I couldn't remember when it came to write my notes, however each one comes with a rich set of associations which may or may not have chimed with Cynthia's own story – which I didn't ever learn in detail. She was also worried that drinking lemon in boiling water was bad for her, she had taken this up as a drink having read that it was healthy. We agreed that one lemon and three green teas a day was probably ok, she checked with Jacob and he agreed – anything in moderation.

A guy I didn't know was reading about ADHD diagnoses and began an outraged description of the problem with drug companies and over prescription. Mental illnesses weren't real anyway – he said. A pregnant woman at the table disagreed with him, he moderated his stance explaining it was an issue of over diagnosis. He cited a study he was aware of in Finland that found counselling was the key to overcoming mental illness, that schizophrenia was usually caused by childhood trauma. I was a bit worried with Cynthia's reaction to this as she had previously identified herself as a paranoid schizophrenic, and as someone who was prescribed medicine but appeared to struggle with taking it consistently.

Other people became involved in the conversation, Carl said that everyone who died of swine flu had been vaccinated against it. He also said ebola was man-made and people are poisoning our food and vaccinations are killing us. Cynthia said quietly that they were probably trying to get rid of all the poor people. Later on I was standing in the kitchen chatting to some new volunteers – or at least people I hadn't met before. Two young mothers, "I'm not giving my kids any vaccinations" one said "I don't want doctors putting anything in that can't be taken out again".

Many at the soup kitchen had at times been pathologised or criminalised in a way that denied them agency. Cynthia wants to learn how to cook, somebody from her church had told her that she shouldn't worry about having a career, they had said she is fine as she is. Her response, she told me, had been to say "I might as well kill myself then". We managed to move gently away from this moment in the conversation. In one sense I agree that Cynthia shouldn't be made to feel that she should 'have a career' however this isn't really what she meant. Cynthia's fantasy wasn't about earning money and getting on a career path, it was about feeding people and cooking, and Cynthia should be able to do whatever she wants.

Attitudes to poverty, to trauma, to mental health issues, to disability and addiction regularly lead to service users at the soup kitchen feel that they were being denied agency, denied desire or authenticity. John and I spoke once about mental health and drug dependency, he had experienced multiple addictions and had a difficult relationship with his family. He had been prescribed some medicine once to help him with his mental health – but it led him to become impotent, and he had a girlfriend at the time. It made him feel like he couldn't make her happy he said. Many, if not all, of the service users at the kitchen found themselves being channelled into lives that they didn't want. Like the sober and boring life that Natalie described to me when she came back from rehab the 'good life' that existed in the state's imagination for people who exist on the margins of society is a bare one (Agamben 1998). In the light of this the apparently conspiratorial conviction that the lives of the poor are being monitored and controlled that was expressed time and again at the soup kitchen can hardly be surprising. Those I met at the soup kitchen who had been forced to the margins of society are embroiled in a bitter game with the state which they cannot win, one that requires constant vigilance and suspicion, which leads only to a grim stalemate in which the state's opponent is permitted a tiny square of territory in which they can survive but not win.

8.10 Conclusion: kind of Cassandras

There is no authentic narrative that can explain the persecution and oppression of those who are forced to the edges of society, those whose basic needs are left to be answered not by the state but by charitable institutions

like the soup kitchen, except one that describes the violent exploitation of human life in the pursuit of economic gain. There is no digestible introduction to the game-like relationship with the state into which the service users had been forced, no equivalent to “Jacks on twos and queens a slag”. As a consequence many at the soup kitchen found themselves drawn to conspiratorial rationales for society’s injustices. These accounts of why evil exists are too easy to dismiss as the ramblings of the abject poor. Through spending time at the soup kitchen and coming to feel that I knew the service users there I observed at first hand the near impossible game-like relationship with the state, and with society at large, that they were forced to participate in to survive. Sometimes it seemed to me that paranoid analyses of what it was to be poor in a neighbourhood changing as rapidly as Brixton is, were the only reasonable response to the situation. Service users were not only alienated from an economic means of production, but social and even psychological means of production. They had no control over the narratives which described them and defined their position in society, and their political speech was all too easy to ignore. As addicts, mentally ill, or more vaguely irrational subjects they are also denied the opportunity to produce their own self in so far as it might be recognised in society.

What first appeared to me as aberrant speech and behaviour soon became the reality of the soup kitchen, and I recognised that through reacting with something like disgust or fear at discussions of drug addiction or mental illness, or through squirming at the mention of familiarly ‘crazy’ conspiracy theories I was participating in a technique of alienation. One which meant that those who knew most about what it was to be poor, to be marginalised, to suffer at the hands of inequality in London, were not listened to. The capacity of the service users to speak truth to power is too easy to ignore. When Cynthia says that they are probably trying to kill all the poor people in response to a discussion about Ebola, I would argue that this should be read as a politically valid statement. When society is viewed from the margins it really does look like ‘they’ are trying to kill all the poor people. Academic researchers must not accept a narrative whereby those who are speaking from the margins are dismissed like Cassandra whose prophecies were always true but never believed, and instead listen when truth is being spoken to power.

What about authenticity? What could authenticity possibly mean at the soup kitchen? In chapter 7 I have already described the illegibility of the black carrot, and Franco Manca pizzas leaving the market as organic sourdough wood fired pizzas and arriving at the soup kitchen as sensory pleasure and nourishment, best served with chips (7.4.1, 7.4.2). These objects were read without access to the external referents that gave them magical and alienating authenticity, instead they were encountered sensorially more directly – when food is viewed as nourishment perhaps it is encountered with an un-alienated authenticity. Is there some perversely un-alienated authenticity to be witnessed in a context where everybody understands what it is to be at the margins of society? This is an implausible claim to make, however in the discussions about society that I heard and participated in at the soup kitchen it was clear that there was an incisive and radical opposition to the social inequality

experienced by service users everyday. Were such speech be given wider recognition in both academia and mainstream discourse it would animate the alienated and abstract figures described by categories such as ‘the poor’ ‘the working class’ ‘ethnic minority’ and so on – and open up a more messy and nuanced field of debate from which an authentic politics which gives greater and more equal value to experience and encounter. Rather like the radical politics which Paul Gilroy argued were visible in the riots of the 1980s, including those in Brixton (1987:244 discussed in section 5.12)

9. Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis I laid out five central aims for the project:

1. Create a document of contemporary Brixton which pays detailed attention to the everyday consequences of the processes of change which are effecting the neighbourhood. To produce a political counter-narrative about these processes of change.
2. Advocate for the value of alienation in describing the effects of economic and social structures in the everyday life of the city.
3. Critique the notion of authenticity as it exists in both academic and popular discourses. Draw a distinction between claims to authenticity which produce alienation and authentic encounters which challenge alienation.
4. Challenge the epistemological bases for research into neighbourhood change, particularly those that have tended to characterise gentrification studies. To argue that a messy epistemology benefits the understanding of the urban neighbourhoods and cities in general.
5. To advocate for sustained ethnographic methodologies in order to produce messier forms of knowledge relevant both to academic urban studies and planning and policy research. To illustrate the value of such a methodology in producing a politically critical account of neighbourhood change through the case study of Brixton.

In this concluding chapter I will take each of these aims in turn and summarise the ways in which this thesis has succeeded in meeting them. In doing so I hope to make clear that this project has made a number of clear and substantive interventions into academic urban studies, and also has potential implications for policy and planning.

9.1 A document of Brixton

This PhD is a document of Brixton. It is an account of a neighbourhood which is undergoing a rapid process of change, a process which has created strong feelings, new wealth, and distress. My research at the soup kitchen, the restaurant and more broadly has revealed a neighbourhood in which the tensions are manifold and arise from a neighbourhood in which change is producing new kinds of social and political encounter. The thesis has also made efforts to describe a fraction of the messy diversity of the neighbourhood and to incorporate a set of competing 'Brixtons' into the narrative presented without fretting overly about seeking a cohesive vision of the neighbourhood.

Chapter 5 gave a view of the many Brixtons which play a role in the contested neighbourhood. Beginning with a fragmented historical account that suggested that these narratives continue to resonate in contemporary Brixton. The purpose of this historical account is to provide a context for the claim made in the protest that is described in the remainder of the chapter, namely what does it mean to want to *Reclaim Brixton*? The chapter describes the chaotic inter-weavings of claim and counterclaim during the street protest, the fractured geographic distribution of dissent through the streets of the neighbourhood. Whilst I argued that there was a sense of alienation emerging from the contested nature of this process, I also suggest, following Gilroy (1987) that the contradictions in the movement may have constituted the basis for a rooted radical movement that he has described. However, ultimately any possibility for a genuine grass roots claim to the neighbourhood was quashed by the whimpering capitalist realism (Fisher 2009) of the local government. Ultimately I suggested that in radical projects of thick description there is a possibility to draw out the strength of everyday political action.

When familiar everyday space such as the covered market changes as dramatically as Brixton Village Market has it is tempting to turn to a politics of nostalgia and loss at the expense of a more complex account. This is not to dismiss the notion that there has been a tangible and violent loss produced at a structural level (see Gonzalez and Waley 2013) but to claim that an ethnographic approach can be valuable in revealing the complex of economic (Gibson-Graham 2006) and other processes in operation in such a space. This thesis accounts for the market not just in terms of its present transformations but in the context of its original construction. The heritage claims which have been made about the markets significance to the Afro-Caribbean community (English Heritage 2010) are put in the perspective of a long history of commercial speculation. The archival material (6.2) referenced in this thesis has revealed a market which has always changed to cater to different customers, presumably in order to provide the most possible revenue. In the same chapter I also described the infrastructural and material ways in which the market's long history of adaptation continue to be evident in the fabric of the space (6.5). The efforts of this thesis to disillusion or at least muddy any clear notion of cultural heritage might seem overly dismissive. However the listing serves to gloss over a transformation which has transformed the clientele of the market (6.7).

This thesis provides a rich set of ethnographic material from interviews and participant observation to create an account of the market which accommodates contrasting scales of observation (Chapter 5, 6 & 7). In interviews with those involved in the campaigns to save, and 'regenerate' the market it was clear that many involved hoped they could produce a space which was viable culturally, socially as well as economically (6.3, 6.4). And whilst some pre-existing business owners have been brought to tears, others appeared pragmatic (6.7). The account from the perspective of a worker, namely me, (6.8-10) revealed the largely ignored poor labour conditions which apparently 'gentrifying' businesses rely upon. It is not enough to simply say that market has

‘gentrified’ this thesis has made a more complex description of the processes which have changed Brixton. The fault lines do not trace a clean boundary between the gentrifiers and the gentrified. Instead there are multiple encounters with difference resulting from the shifting nature of Brixton. Mary, my boss at the restaurant, was at once critical of the way that Brixton was changing and also defensive of her role in those changes (5.9). As a worker in the market I experienced a level of alienation and exploitation (6.8), but my experience of the social and economic conditions driving Brixton’s transformation can hardly be compared to those of the service users at the soup kitchen, such as Johnny who was forced to quit his one day a week job on a market stall in order to not to fall foul of the complexities of welfare benefits (8.5). This very partial account of Brixton aims to broaden the image of a neighbourhood experiencing a messy transition, rather than reduce it to clean terms of analysis.

Chapter 7 compared encounters with food in the restaurant with some of those observed at the soup kitchen. Here the sustained nature of the ethnographic research in this project allowed me to develop a clear empirical account of the way that authenticity and alienation play out in banal aspects of daily life. This chapter attempted to accommodate and critique structuralist (e.g. Douglas 2002) and psychoanalytical (Kristeva 1982, Winnicott 1964) accounts of the disgusting otherness of food, and develop a position which related this experience of disgust to the economic conditions of society (7.2). This chapter made a close account of eating practices in the two main fieldsites of this project. In doing so it made efforts to empirically develop the role of alienation and authenticity in the neighbourhood and to argue for a radical and political reading of eating. This is particularly important in this account of Brixton due to the centrality of food businesses in the transformation of the neighbourhood’s reputation within London.

The final chapter of this thesis is perhaps the most important part of this messy document of Brixton. It is an account of the everyday cruelty that constitutes a life lived in poverty in Brixton. Through a detailed description of the card game that was played at the soup kitchen I argue that many of the service users had a relationship with the state which was similarly game-like but did not leave them the opportunity to win. The chapter draws attention to the political speech that was a common part of being at the soup kitchen and argues that careful listening to such speech without dismissing it as ‘irrational’ provides a critical perspective on society which is often unheard or dismissed. Here alienation plays a role again, the notion of irrationality or extremeness a means to deny access to political and social means of production to the service users at the soup kitchen.

As a document of Brixton the thesis provides a wide ranging account of a neighbourhood which is undergoing a particularly disruptive period of change. As a necessarily fragmentary account of such a complex and large neighbourhood, rather than aspiring to survey the neighbourhood in its totality this thesis focuses closely on the fine grained. In these instances there is a radical politics which needs revealing more than it does theorising.

In doing so I hope to not only provide a valuable document about the neighbourhood but also to demonstrate the value of sustained ethnographic fieldwork for urban geography.

9.2 Alienated – from work, to place

Whilst completing this thesis I spent further time working in restaurants and cafes, though not as researcher, but like many students, purely as a worker. Writing up my final chapters whilst spending days and nights serving tables or making flat whites added an additional element of performativity to the completion of my thesis. It also served to reinforce the centrality of the notion of alienation. I suggest that whilst it is a term that has already had its moment in human geography (Ollman 1975; Harvey 2008), it deserves a reappraisal. It has been particularly valuable in this thesis in negotiating the relationship between structure and agency.

It emerged from my research and not the other way round, not just through the experience of being a worker and earning low pay whilst also knowing the actual value of the goods sold, but more importantly from the distance that separated many of the people I met in the neighbourhood, even between critical voices. Regarding structure and agency, there is already a clear connecting line in Marx's 1844 manuscript (2000) between the experience of the worker relating to the means of production and his perception of his position in society relative to all others (2.1). The reading of alienation made in chapter 2 was also vital for refining the discussion of authenticity (see following section).

In this thesis the idea of alienation was a way of linking the politics of the everyday and the structural politics which has tended to dominate the analysis of neighbourhood change (see chapter 3). In arguing that alienation is identifiable in other urban research (2.2) I tried to argue that it is a term which helps draw connections between politics encountered at different scales of observation. The term played a central role in the ethnographic accounts of Brixton and provided a means to connect specific phenomena such as conspiracy theories to more general ones, such as the actions of the state (chapter 8).

Alienation insofar as it is discussed in this thesis is a broad concept. It is about the experience of distance as felt by an individual whether it is distance from means of production or distance from another person. Crucially I have tried to argue, following Marx, that experiences of alienation provide a clear link between overt interactions with capitalist society, e.g. in the workplace to less obvious ones – such as feeling alienated from the place in which one lives. Crucially I have argued that this distance produces a desire for authenticity, a desire for unmediated 'authentic' interactions like those described in chapter 2 following Berman and Benjamin. However this need for authenticity is also met by claims to authenticity which rely not on the actual encounter between two things but through being symbolically vouched for. In the following section I will discuss this in

more detail and explain how the idea of authentic politics and authentic research respond to the engagement with alienation in this thesis.

9.3 The possibility of authenticity

Chapter 2 introduced authenticity through a critique of Sharon Zukin's writing about consumption and urban regeneration (2008,2009). In that chapter I challenged Zukin's use of the term and what I have argued is a misreading of Walter Benjamin (1999). With reference to Marshall Berman's contrasting deployment of authenticity (1971) I tried to distinguish between two uses of the term. Authenticity based on a semiotic resemblance – e.g. authentic Italian food because I know it is made by an Italian - and the authenticity of an un-mediated encounter. I argued that the first form of authenticity is alienating & alienated, and that the second is un-alienated, it is the authenticity of closeness and experience. This second notion of authenticity came to stand for a radical political encounter which is unmediated and un-prejudiced by exterior notions of what is authentic.

In chapter 3 I used this as a basis to critique positivist forms of social research which prioritised ordered representations of society over sensuous and messy knowledge. In chapter 4 I suggested that this un-alienated and authentic research could be related to the Benjaminian practice of paying strict attention (Buck Morss 1991:146), an approach which clearly resonates with ethnographic methodologies of thick description (Geertz: 1973; see 4.3.1). In this way I argued that an empirical approach which prioritised attentiveness and descriptiveness over tidiness could be seen to be a critical and political approach to social research.

In this way the absurdly lofty notion of authentic research (4.6) served the purpose of joining the theoretical and methodological considerations of this thesis. In chapter 5's description of the Reclaim Brixton protest the relationship between alienation and authenticity emerged clearly in the empirical account of the event. The protest itself was at once full of political distance and experiences of alienation between participants and at the same time an opportunity for a platform to emerge. But in the failure or smothering of the protest there was a lost opportunity for an un-alienated and authentic form of solidarity suffocated by a negative form of governance in which the local government repeatedly claimed to have no power over issues such as the eviction of the arches. Any possibility of a purposeful coalition emerging from the protest was prevented by the recurring claim that there was nothing to be done. The means through which an alternative neighbourhood could be constructed were apparently not controlled by the council, hence there was no way for the protestors to wield any such influence.

In the case of food in chapter 7 I argued that the alienation that people experience regarding food is an inevitable consequence of a society in which food remains a commodity; that authenticity is a way to remedy the dis-ease that this presents people with. Those who have access to cultural power, such as the diners at the restaurant inoculate themselves against the threat of food through notions of what is and isn't authentic, these alienated claims to authenticity are ultimately only a gloss over alienation. In the conclusion to the chapter I argue with reference to Serres that close attention to the food that we are eating can be a radical act in itself, to allow sensuous experience to be more important than cultural or social significance is to recognise that everybody can eat, and everyone could eat together. The pizzas we ate at the soup kitchen every Monday lost their cultural power during the walk back from the restaurant, but lost none of their ability to create pleasure and provide sustenance.

In this image of the radical meal, in which the eating mouth is allowed to taste before the speaking mouth does (Serres 2008) a genuinely interesting social space can be imagined. One in which encounter with human or non-human is unmediated by competing claims about what something is. As a thought experiment this becomes more powerful when we imagine people speaking at this table of authentic encounter. In a close reading of a number of political discussions at the soup kitchen chapter 8 develops the notion that the way in which some of the service users at the kitchen dealt with the state put them into a position of irrational actor. I think in my research there were moments in discussions with those I came to know well at the soup kitchen when I was *really* listening to what I was being told. The idea of authentic research is to listen and to experience and to just be in a place, and in doing so this thesis has been able to represent an account of the way in which those most marginalised in Brixton were experiencing social change at a small scale.

9.4. *Messy epistemology*

It has been necessary to relate the transformation of Brixton to existing research into gentrification due to the role the term plays in local discourse. I have also argued that it is better considered as a colloquial term than an analytical one. In chapter 3 I used this literature as a basis for constructing a position which resists theory making in exchange for maintaining a level of mess and complexity in the representation of my research. Rather than focussing exclusively on theoretical interventions into urban studies I wish to emphasise the epistemological and methodological arguments put forward and demonstrated in this thesis.

The idea of a messy epistemology established in the first section of chapter 3 found its starting point in the poetic account of London in Ruth Glass' introductory essay to *London Aspects of Change* (1964). I argued that this description of the city reveals a more complex and more contradictory way of considering urban space

(4.2). Chapter 4 relates Ruth Glass's writing to writing about complexity (Law 2004, Hayles 1991) and critical feminist geographies which relate ideas of complexity to social identity (McCall 2005). In this way I tried to develop a clear position about the value of messy epistemologies for critical urban studies. Most importantly I made efforts to demonstrate this principle methodologically (9.5). As examples, the fragmentary account of Brixton's history in chapter 5 being allowed to stand in contrast to the rich description of a protest. The major impact that this emphasis on messy epistemologies has had on this thesis has been the decision to produce substantial sections of ethnographic writing rather than interspersing it with analysis to produce a more tidy account. I want the full and complex reality to have as much a bearing on the shape of this thesis as possible. This has made a clear contribution to the way that this thesis has developed fieldwork observations. For instance the relationship between the card game and relationships with the state at the soup kitchen came not through cool analysis but through brute coincidence. In the writing and re-writing of my fieldnotes the discussion about conspiracy theories and the account of the card game slowly came to illuminate one another.

9.5 Ethnographic methods

Ethnographic research, particularly when approached with thick description at front of mind inevitably produces complex and messy data. The value of such data is not limited to making a point about epistemology, but I believe this thesis has demonstrated its clear value to pragmatic debates about how the city should be shaped, both in terms of policy and planning and academic research.

Chapters 5 and 6 both provide accounts of issues and events which are central to the debates surrounding neighbourhood change in Brixton. Chapter 5 suggested that an activist milieu in Brixton that came together at the Reclaim Brixton protest resembled the kind of successful movements discussed hopefully as urban social movements (Castells 1983, Novy & Colomb 2013). The rich account of local politics in action revealed some of the small tensions that emerged within the coalition of activists and also suggest that the discourse of austerity was in part responsible for the fact that this protest did not become the basis for a more fruitful movement in the neighbourhood. In chapter 6 the combination of interviews, archival material, and participant-observation produced a nuanced account of the transformation of Brixton Village Market. In particular the critique of the listing and the account of heritage as an adequate way to make the market serve its community rested on observations of infrastructure (6.5) which would not have been available without a level of ethnographic research.

In the case of chapter 5 a sustained presence in a neighbourhood meant that an event which might otherwise have been considered in isolation benefitted from being in the context of a rich set of embedded knowledge.

I want to advocate for such longitudinal ethnographic research in academic approaches to neighbourhood change. It is valuable to talk to those who are experiencing such change but also being in a place over a long period of time and finding a fuller context for such analysis allowed me to create a nuanced account of local activism in response to neighbourhood change.

The ethnographic approach taken in this thesis enabled a complex notion of heritage and history to emerge in relation to the market, and the neighbourhood. In particular, heritage is a term which often features in debates over planning. Indeed the statement from the council officer “how do we retain this unique character, and continue to grow” that appeared in the introduction to this thesis reveals the importance of such thinking in Brixton. Were council officers to have access to rich long term knowledge of the neighbourhoods in which they worked I suggest that they would have a better and more nuanced understanding of the impacts of planning decisions on the everyday space over which they preside. During my research I attended a number of consultations, though they have not found space in this thesis. If planning officers allowed more weight to the everyday knowledge that was often put forward by residents and business owners, the terms of debate may have been more easily established. It is my intention that this thesis will have impact beyond an immediately academic context and in future efforts to disseminate its findings. There are clear pragmatic and achievable methodological implications for urban policy and planning.

Whilst the research methodology in this thesis would not be feasible for a planning officer to commission the forms of knowledge such a method creates could be pursued by other means. Given the opportunity to make a recommendation to the council it would be that they should give more weight to the knowledge of people in the community, not through community consultations but by maintaining long term close relationships and giving weight to lived knowledge. In one consultation that I attended about the street market in Brixton there was a stand-off between a prominent stall holder and a council officer following a consultant’s report on footfall on the market, the stall holder politely explained that whilst he recognised that the research represented one form of knowledge they also needed to listen to what he knew as the third generation of market workers in his family. Local councils ought to fund the ongoing collection of local knowledge, a kind of borough specific mass observation exercises. This could be done cost effectively by hiring one person to manage this data and training council officers in the value of thick description. It might sound less far fetched were the new post to be called a ‘community knowledge champion’ or something suitably policy document friendly. Their responsibility would be to interview people, walk through the neighbourhood ‘hang around’ and attend council meetings and write reports. They would also be responsible for developing better participation in consultations by building relationships with those who might otherwise feel excluded from these processes, people like Mei in the market (6.7) who had a lot to say but felt they had no one to say it to. A neighbourhood contains a wealth of information about itself, if this could be captured in a way that does not reduce it to data points and

transcripts it may be that local political decisions can be made with a more nuanced appreciation of the neighbourhood such decisions will effect.

9.6 Conclusion

Brixton is a neighbourhood which has played a significant part in the history of London since the 19th century when new kind of high street was developed there. In recent years it has once again been a place where developers and speculators have capitalised on new forms of consumption and neighbourhood regeneration. It is a neighbourhood which deserves careful consideration, and one which cannot easily be encompassed within the bounds of a research project. This thesis has told a messy and partial story about Brixton, and this account offers epistemological, methodological, and theoretical contributions to the study of cities which have emerged from a sustained and detailed ethnographic project.

Authenticity is a trope easily identified in contemporary life, at least in terms of its presence as what I have termed alienated authenticity. To say I am like that thing, or this is like that thing, has become an invaluable tactic in the negotiation of change in a society which seems to be ever more unpredictable, ungainly, and messy. The idea of alienation has taken up particular significance in contemporary political discussions following the Brexit referendum and the Trump election in 2016. When I first started to write about alienation it seemed to be something of a throwback (e.g. Ollman 1971) and now Owen Jones bases his analysis of the EU Referendum around “furious, alienated working-class votes” (Jones 2016). Equally my interest in conspiracy theories (chapter 8) seemed to be an act of paying attention to something easily overlooked; but with the rise of ‘fake news’ the centre ground is now being forced to pay attention to marginal speech as they vie for control of the mainstream. Whilst this has not been the context in which the entwined ideas of authenticity and alienation have been approached in this thesis, it underlines the importance in taking them seriously. When the spectral and abstract ‘white working class’ start misbehaving electorally it is essential that academics ask difficult questions about what these terms actually mean.

Personally one of the most significant impacts of this research project was the experience of meeting people who had previously been mere abstract notions in my politics and study. People with addiction problems, people who are homeless, people who own businesses, people who run regeneration schemes, spending serious time observing the workings of a neighbourhood, and meeting people who had been all too easy to categorise presented a profound challenge to the way I think about the city in which I live, and society more broadly. I have learned that there is no ideal form to which such characters in urban life conform, any notion of the authentic working class is undercut by the vast messiness that constituted my encounter with Brixton. But in a

time when such problematic categories play divisive roles in the construction of political discourse I have found a certain optimism in the idea that they might be put into a more messy and shifting context through fine grained and detailed research. I hope that this research serves to provide an intervention into urban studies which strives to represent the city in a way which is un-alienated and authentic. Not in the sense that there is a cogent idea of Brixton which is observable in the world, but that there isn't. But that to say so is not to turn away from political critique, but to offer a reading of a neighbourhood which creates a sense of space and messiness from which radical and difficult ideas can emerge.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: List of Interlocutors

Soup Kitchen:

Carl	I was never too sure how old Carl was, he often spoke with youthful enthusiasm, though other days seemed irritable and distant. He spoke a lot but rarely about himself, he was an aficionado of conspiracy theories and thought seriously about politics and society. At times his enthusiasm overwhelmed conversations which he interrupted. Initially he seemed distrustful but he began to trust me and asked me to help him with a job application. After this he confided in me his desire to become clean was driven by wanting to make his mother proud of him.
Cynthia	Late thirties woman who seemed much younger. Afro Caribbean with short hair and an expression that oscillated between curiosity, confusion and concentration. A habitual list maker who was writing down prayers and trying to get her Bible repaired when I first met her. A fan of baked goods. She was open about her mental health and once announced to the entire room that she had been diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic.
Debbie	Debbie was a volunteer, she is white and in her late thirties or early forties. She lived nearby and volunteered at the soup kitchen. She had grown up in the neighbourhood and would often find that she knew a service user or had friends in common with them. She was on Jobseekers allowance and had experienced having her benefits sanctioned.
Frances	For much of the time I knew Frances she was straining with her whole self to get clean. She seemed to be having better success than John – which contributed to the breakdown of their relationship according to her. She had become part of the local Jehovah's witness congregation and appeared to find great solace in bible study and the community there. She would often discuss the parts of the bible that she was reading. She was in her forties and she had no teeth, an addiction to crack had destroyed her teeth, she had had them all removed and was waiting for her gums to heal before she could be fitted with dentures. Her background was middle class and she had children who were at

	<p>university and lived with her parents. She alluded to traumatic experiences in her childhood. She was a kind woman who I often spoke to about my own life.</p>
Harry	<p>Harry had had a wealthy middle class upbringing. He felt very conscious of the dissonance of being a young Black man in the 60s and 70s who was privileged and wealthy. He spoke about what he called 'social displacement' and the process of learning about black British culture through trips to Brixton as a young man. He adopted the position of an elder at the soup kitchen, he would occasionally allude to bankruptcies in the past but never offered a clear narrative of what had taken him to this point. He seemed to have been a financial adviser to the famous in the eighties and was in the process of trying to re-establish his wealth.</p>
Jacob	<p>Jacob is a man whose character and physical size match each other in magnitude. The same age as Mo they had been friends since they were young. Jacob had also been involved in youth work they had started the soup kitchen in the estate that Jacob grew up in. His gregariousness and confidence had led him to become something of a local celebrity, appearing on television a number of times in the capacity of soup kitchen founder on news programmes and documentaries. He had also recently participated in a television cooking programme much to the amusement of soup kitchen regulars. At the same time he would speak of being young and awkward and I heard him reflect on the fact that his larger than life character was important to his work to promote the soup kitchen and build relationships with the businesses whose donations the kitchen relied upon.</p>
James	<p>James was manic and intensely clever. He is black and in his forties. He could be a good card player but often seemed to lack the attention span. He told us a story about choking on the drugs he tried to swallow whilst being arrested. He had a child and would spend long amounts of time on the phone. Sometimes he would intensely involve himself in discussion around the table, others he would hang in the background saying little. He thought seriously about politics and I had a number of interesting conversations about Brixton and British politics in general.</p>
Jay	<p>Jay was the volunteer who was in every day, he was ostensibly the manager being the first person who service users would ask for things or who might</p>

	<p>challenge the behaviour of service users. Jay Mo and Jacob had a sibling-like friendship which was sustained by teasing and wind-ups. Jay was possibly the best blackjack player and he taught me how to play the card game. Outside of volunteering he was a clubnight promoter and gave me a couple of promo cds he had made with mixes of R n B and Hip Hop. This part of his life was seriously impacted by the changes in Brixton, fewer clubnights were willing to put on nights playing black music, instead focussing on house and techno perceived to draw a wealthier and whiter crowd.</p>
John	<p>John would always wear a big coat, he looked as if he was in his fifties but it was hard to judge his age, his skin was pale and perhaps a little jaundiced. He was one of the first people I heard openly talk about drugs at the soup kitchen when I first met him along with Frances, who was his girlfriend at the time. Months after I first met him I had a long conversation with him after he had arrived at the soup kitchen evidently distressed after having an argument with his father. His Dad owned a business in Brixton and John had a poor relationship with his dad who he helped with money even though he had none but seemed to be frightened of. Alcohol and numerous drugs had defined his life and relapses had led to the eventual breakdown of his relationship with Frances.</p>
Johnny	<p>Johnny came to the soup kitchen with his girlfriend Nicola, at the time they had no electricity and no benefits. He had been advised to leave his one day a week job and apply for full benefits but 12 weeks of delays had led to enormous difficulty for the pair, which had brought them to the soup kitchen. Their situation regarding electricity was due to a complex arrangement with their electricity meter, they needed a coin to activate it but their landlord had allowed them to just take it back out and he would charge them every month. However they didn't even have the coin they needed to turn on the electricity which meant Johnny couldn't safely store his insulin in the fridge. I should have given them money, but I was nervous of the ethical implications of doing so. Johnny and Nicola stopped coming after he got a job, but the next time I saw them months later I learned that the job had been curtailed by a spell in prison following Johnny's conviction from an assault on a football pitch which had ended his career as a semi professional footballer.</p>

Kelley	Kelley was my first point of contact when volunteering at the soup kitchen because she appeared to be the only person who answered their email address. While I was volunteering at the soup kitchen she would pop in only occasionally as she had a young family and a job. She took a somewhat parental role often teasingly scolding Mo, Jacob or other long standing volunteers.
Laurie	Laurie was an ex-prisoner. As a young man he had a promising career as a sportsman that had come to a premature end for reasons that he never fully explained. He had spent time working as a gas fitter and had worked for the council for a number of years, a job that he had enjoyed and had paid well. Most recently had spent time in prison for a crime that he did not openly discuss. He was coming to the soup kitchen for company and adopted an ambiguous role somewhere between volunteer and service user. He is Caribbean and he spoke from time to time about being a Rastafarian. He appeared to know almost everyone in Brixton!
Maria	Maria was an intense woman, perhaps in her early thirties. She only came into the soup kitchen a few times but she had a significant impact on me due to one particularly difficult encounter. She clearly suffered from serious mental health problems and could be very manipulative. She cornered me for some time asking me questions like “other people say I’m mad, do you think I’m mad”. Her behaviour led to a meeting that Mo organised after the soup kitchen closed. It highlighted to me that as volunteers we had plenty of empathy but were not necessarily equipped to deal with people whose mental health and behaviour were as disturbing as Maria’s was.
Matthew	Matthew was a volunteer and an excellent card player and trash talker. It took me some time to realise that his occasional harsh words where ultimately in the spirit of friendship! Or perhaps it took him a while to be friendly with me. His family were from a North African country which they had left as refugees when he was young. I learned this when we were unpacking harvest festival boxes from a local school full of cans and other non perishables. I said that it was interesting to unpack things which I had always contributed to without thinking about where they were going. He said he always knew because often such appeals were in aid of the country he had been born in.

Mo	Mo was one of the founders of the soup kitchen late twenties early thirties, he often took the role as the responsible one versus the other half of the soup kitchen double act, Jacob. However he was also enormously funny and personable. He was black and Muslim and was involved with the local mosque who often contributed food and volunteers to the soup kitchen. He had been a youth worker for years and was passionate about it. He had an advisory role with the police and was highly critical about the way that young black people were treated in London and beyond. As a young man he had been shot after intervening in a fight while working as security, once he showed me the photographs of his injuries.
Natalie	Natalie was born outside of Britain in a country that used to be a British colony. She is white and in her late forties or early fifties. She studied Geology at university and has children but no longer saw them. She lives alone and was trying to get rehoused in order to make it easier to go through rehab. She had a long term drinking problem and was often drunk when she came to the soup kitchen. She called me “Mr Sam”
Neil	Neil was another of the people who ran the soup kitchen and had been involved for a long time. He was a dedicated youth worker. He was involved in outreach work with young people who had fallen out of the support network provided by Kid’s Company. He was an authority figure and was looked up to by Mo and Jacob, at times he would be frustrated with short comings in the organisation of the soup kitchen and he would say so. He was in his forties and had grown up in Brixton, deeply committed to helping young people in the neighbourhood negotiate the dangers presented by gangs and drugs.
Nicola	Nicola was a loving and supportive partner to Johnny, the two would take turns making the difficult phone calls regarding their benefits or other ongoing administrative processes. Where Johnny was often very pessimistic, and would describe the challenges he had faced Nicola’s optimism made her harder to get to know in a way. She would read magazines or discuss television with other service users. Her good humour meant that she often greeted hardship with sarcastic marks. When she got a job in Subway while Johnny was in Prison she was made redundant after four weeks “How can you be made redundant by Subway” she said laughing.

Nissim	Nissim was hard to get to know. He made a game of being controversial, he took a strange glee in winding up other service users. It took me some time to appreciate that he was fully aware of how shocking some of his views could be. I found him largely unsympathetic, he could be cruel, such as commenting on Cynthia's weight. However one morning he decided to speak to me more candidly. He explained to me that he preferred sleeping outside, and that he had been travelling around the world for much of his life taking short term jobs, we spoke about a mutual love of the countryside and Scotland. I wondered if his hostility was as much defense as it was attack. He spoke English with a strong French accent, he wore a beard, he never described his ethnicity to me.
Paul	Paul had grey hair and wrinkled skin, he looked to be in his sixties. When I first met him he dressed like a hippy and wore flip flops, he often wore necklaces and tie dye. He was rarely clear headed enough for conversation and could be quite disruptive because he was outgoing and attention seeking, though often very funny. However about two thirds through my time at the soup kitchen he came in crying, he had defecated himself, he was very drunk and explained that he had seen a friend die. He came back a few weeks later sober in both dress and demeanour. He had a job at a newsagent, he was calm and serious and would quietly read the newspaper. It became possible to talk to him but he still revealed little of himself.

Restaurant:

Alberto	Alberto joined the staff more than half way through my fieldwork, he was Italian and I enjoyed spending quiet shifts talking to him about food. He had some experience as a chef but not lots, but he quickly got up to speed. As I had already worked at the restaurant for some time I took the role of chief taster when we were working together, helping him refine his versions of the restaurant's dishes.
Andre	Andre was the same age as Chloe and they'd been working together for about as long as each other. The result was they were full of bickering, in an exhausting and inexhaustible brother/sister dynamic. Andre was at university studying film, he was passionate about what he did and would talk at length

	about it. He had given up a promising career as a sprinter when he was younger because there was so little guarantee that it would go anywhere.
Antonia	Antonia was French, she was studying painting – she was notable for being very small. I always liked working with her as she preferred to wash up rather than wait tables. She intermittently went home during holidays and didn't work at the restaurant at all over the summer.
Beth	Beth was probably the best chef who worked at the restaurant, she gradually cut down her hours while I worked there. She had numerous other more high profile jobs and was an increasingly busy food stylist and freelance chef. She spent her free time learning circus skills, Yoga, and going to festivals. She was in her early thirties. She had been one of the original chefs at the restaurant.
Chloe	Chloe had been working at the restaurant since she was 15, she was 20 now, she knew everything about the business and despite her age often took on managerial responsibilities. She would do ordering, training, she would write to do lists for us. Chloe was the person you would ask if you had a question about the restaurant, there were many occasions that people would ask her advice rather than Mary. She was also responsible for writing the rota which meant that she was often on the receiving end of the anger of other front of house staff. Chloe was an actor, so that she at various times needed weeks off for rehearsal.
Claire	Claire was an Irish photographer and worked freelance alongside her job at the restaurant. She was a very experienced restaurant worker and she was employed as a supervisor or restaurant manager, or something. She was paid more than me and she was in charge of more things. She was also a fantastic leftie and we spend various hours talking about unionising the restaurant workers of the market.
Claude	A Frenchman in his late twenties. Claude moved to London with his partner who worked in marketing for a large company. He was trying to establish a career as a chef. He was quite reserved and he was quietly let go from the job as he wasn't quite up to busy shifts.
James	James was an art student, he started at about the same time as me he was studying painting at an art college. I learned as I got to know him that he was actually older than me, despite being an undergraduate. He had previously worked in finance, bought a house, almost gotten married, before he realised

	he wasn't doing what he wanted to do so he went to art college. As with all of the students James' availability was affected by whether it was term time or not.
Marcus	Marcus was another art student, but not in the same place as James and Antonia. I very rarely worked with him, which made me nervous that he hated me. He was very good friends with one of the chefs, who was my favourite to work with, so perhaps it was just because we both wanted the same shifts. Unlike James who seemed quite straight down the line in his approach to painting Marcus made more unusual art works he wore tracksuits almost exclusively and often had his hair dyed different colours.
Martha	Martha was Scottish and younger than me. She lived in Brixton and worked in the kitchen often. She was another chef who I was always grateful to be on shift with as she was easy to talk to. For her the job at the restaurant was an opportunity to gain some experience as a chef before going abroad to do a professional qualification. We would gossip about our colleagues and tell stories about our own lives.
Mary	Mary was my boss at the restaurant, she was in her early thirties, a few years older than me. She had a child who was just starting at school when I worked at the restaurant. Mary had begun the business with a friend, it had grown out of a hobby and an enthusiasm for food. She was an astute business person. She had studied literature and wrote very well, we had a few tenuous social connections. Mary was somewhat torn between being a friendly boss and a successful business person, this led to tensions with the staff from time to time. Ultimately however she was friendly and caring over the fairly tightly knit group of employees at the restaurant.
Mary's Husband	Mary's Husband had a career as a craftsman and put his hand to mending all sorts of things at the restaurant. He was in a band who had brushes with success but never quite broke through.
Niamh	Niamh only worked one or two shifts with me, she had been working at the restaurant for years and it had led to her making a career in food. She had met her boyfriend while he worked at another restaurant in the market, he was now working in a newly opened high end restaurant.
Val	Val was my favourite chef to work with, she was fun to talk to and we would get through both quiet and hectic shifts with good humour. She was a few

	years older than me, gossipy and sarcastic. She had her own business in West London. She also worked as a food stylist including for some high profile chefs. She and Mary had a bristly relationship for some reason, however Val was one of the longest standing chefs and was the backbone of the kitchen in terms of getting prep done and maintaining inventory.
Vik	Vik ran a restaurant in the market and had clearly known most of those working at the restaurant since its early days. He would come in when one of the longer standing staff were in, Cal, Beth, or Chloe and catch up with them.

Others connected to the market and local retail

Asif	Asif ran a fabric shop in the market and felt his business suffering in the wake of the market's shift towards food and leisure.
Fellow waiters	Waiters at neighbouring restaurants came to be familiar to me through food swaps arranged now and again to prevent us becoming fed up with our staff meals!
Freddy	Freddy ran one of the businesses being evicted from the arches and he generously gave me a long interview about his business and his life as a businessman in Brixton. He took the business over from his parents who moved to Britain from Europe. He reflected on the difficulty of running a shop given the power of supermarkets and their ability to provide specialty ingredients which used to be the reserve of businesses like his.
Grocery Staff	Almost everyday included a trip to one particular large grocery store in the neighbouring covered market. I came to know the faces of many of those who worked there. I would stop and make small talk with one of the daughters of the family who owned the business as we had a friend in common.
Jimmy	Jimmy ran a Caribbean restaurant in the market which he had taken over around the time of the market's transformation. He was from Trinidad and by his reckoning this had meant that he was an improvement on the Jamaican business that had previously occupied his restaurant and had closed under a cloud after accusations relating to drug dealing.
John	John is a Scot in his late fifties and has a long career as a chef, having cooked for various famous people as a private chef and travelled around the world.

	He started his business in the first wave of newcomers to the market. He also filled in from time to time at the restaurant where I worked where we became friendly. He is one of those people who likes to be outrageous in order to test your limits.
Malcolm	Malcolm is one of the founding members of Spacemakers and was central to the transformation of Brixton village market as overseen by that group. He is white and in his early forties. He has since left London and Spacemakers behind him and now lives in Northern Europe. Besides Spacemakers he is involved in an arts project which is interested in the mythmaking that might follow a post-collapse society.
Mark	Mark is in his forties. He is white and has lived in Brixton for some time. He has had various career in design and writing, he has a masters degree in urban studies. He was one of the founding members of friends of Brixton Market, a community group formed to protect and promote Brixton village and other markets in the neighbourhood. He had a somewhat fraught relationship with the time he spent involved in this campaign. Politically he appeared to feel in conflict with the consequences of the market's transformation.
Mei	Mei was Malaysian and had lived in Brixton for many years, she took over her shop from a relative. She clearly felt strongly about the way the market had changed having experienced her business falling away in the wake of Brixton Village Market's transformation. She was less resentful of other businesses than she was of landlords and local politicians.
Omar	Omar ran a grocers that specialised in Latin and Caribbean food in the market. He is serious and pragmatic and seemingly unconcerned about the ways in which the market had changed.
Paul	Paul is in his early thirties, a journalist who had grown up in Brixton and had been a founding member of friends of Brixton Market. He subsequently spent time working in local government. He was inspired to become involved in his neighbourhood apparently after having a dream about Brixton market whilst living abroad.

Other local institutional actors not substantially featured in the thesis:

Regen head	I spoke to the head of regeneration twice about some of the political context surrounding the future plans for Brixton town centre, POP Brixton, and the eviction of the arches.
Regen officer	Having met a regeneration officer at a consultation he met me twice for informal conversations largely based around the future regeneration plans for Brixton.
Heritage officer	I met a heritage officer to discuss her work in securing funding for Electric Avenue and the Street Market from the national lottery and London Mayor.
Regen agency	I attended a meeting at an agency hired as part of an economic planning project run by the council. In this meeting I met one senior consultant who had previously worked in the public sector and two younger consultants. The discussion was centred around the preparation of a report for the council.
Architect	I met an architect from a firm who also consulted on the economic planning project. She had been part of a team who had recorded information about the economic make up of the high street.
Brixton Pound	I came to know the general manager of the Brixton Pound who I interviewed once. I worked in their office for a day and also a number of days at their temporary shop front.

Appendix 2: Research relating to the council without detailed accounts in this thesis

The research process also included the attendance of a number of events relating to local political organisations, largely the council, which were not described in detail in this thesis. The reason for not including these aspects of the research is that I wanted to represent the politics of Brixton from a more everyday perspective, the perspective which I gained through my interlocutors at the market and the soup kitchen. It was also in part due to my awareness of a PhD project by a researcher at Leicester that focussed on housing and the council regeneration team. This research will likely feature in future publications or feed into further research in Brixton.

1. Academy of Urbanism Event: The council, the arts collective Anchor and Magnet and the Academy of Urbanism came together to discuss the neighbourhood, its heritage and its future. As well as plenary discussions and short talks from council officers there was an afternoon of tours organised by Anchor and Magnet. I attended in the capacity of assistant to Anchor and Magnet taking notes and helping to set up the room.

2. Unite Communities housing network: A meeting organised by Unite union to discuss the various housing campaigns in the neighbourhood, an academic and an east London housing campaign group gave talks and participated in Q&A.
3. Brixton Green design consultation: Council, architects, and Brixton Green corporation presented designs for a housing development on Somerleyton road with a focus on energy saving plans. Attendance was poor, most were recognisable local activists and there appeared to be little participation from those who currently lived on Somerleyton road and would be due to take up these new tenancies.
4. Economic planning meeting: A council meeting where initial findings from a research project about Brixton's economic future were presented by an architecture firm and a regeneration firm.
5. Regeneration firm meeting: I observed a meeting at the regeneration firm discussing the final write up of the economic planning meeting following the discussion I attended at the town hall.
6. Air Quality consultation: A meeting organised by UCL researchers to explore awareness of air quality issues in Brixton.
7. Street Market Consultation: Meeting organised to discuss proposed regeneration of Electric Avenue with the existing street market traders. The meeting was somewhat overshadowed by a separate debate regarding parking and car access.

Appendix 3: Project Timeline

October 2013	PhD Begins Initial site visits Academy of Urbanism event attendance Champagne and Fromage opening protest
March 2014	Brixton Unite police event Interview with Mark
April 2014	Interview with Malcolm Interview with Paul
January 2015	Job search
February 2015	Restaurant Job begins
March 2015	Economic planning meeting Regeneration firm meeting
April 2015	First shift at Soup Kitchen
August 2015	Stop working at restaurant

	Increase time at Soup Kitchen Interviews with Mary, Mei, John and others involved in market Street market consultation
December 2015	End of soup kitchen volunteering Fieldwork concludes

Appendix 4: Extracts from field notes

4.1 Brixton Unite 6th March 2014

Brixton police party

Windrush square is a place for police today in blue tents. Beside the dance united stall are the police cadets - anaemic looking. There is free food from a catering school, the battersea dogs home, a stand with forms for reporting hate crimes on. At the police station cops stand in ranks, not sure yet what to do - just waiting they say, just an operation, that they don't seem to understand. They'll wait all day to arrest people if they have to.

The activists I recognise are waiting too. It is aimlessly bustling here in the square, all the real police are elsewhere - only cadets and PCOs are at this party. Video cameras from the BBC who believe in objectivity above everything, particularly above criticism.

They have to move the shot around me, writing this in the background. Joshing and laughing on all sides a perfect balance. The person being interviewed is talking about fear of police for black and Asian people.

Policeman comes over and talks to me, I asked him a question earlier. I mention my PhD research. You say it's changed, he said, I grew up in Mitcham and aside from the house prices "I don't know how much it has changed... Everyone gets along ... But when ever you get a lot of people concentrated in one place, you get trouble." He wishes me luck and walks away.

A lady with a pram asks a policeman what's happening "Community messages - so it's everywhere" he says - reassuringly.

Smelling and policing. The apologetic look on the face of the dog handler as his darling hound reveals the

incontrovertible truth time and again. Bust guards squeezed into hands of people as they wait for their escort.

Many of the police seemed very happy to see each other. Like a summer party - "tell you what you need to pull your finger out mate" one says a dog handler and they shake hands laughing.

2 CSO waiting to board up an empty flat "to stop squatters" our chat is interrupted when he asks a cyclist to get off of the pavement 1/2. He explains the day is about "crime prevention". I comment that there are a lot of police at the station, I get a "yeah" and a wry smile.

A police cadet in his uniform - chuffed. A clutch of cops in plain clothes, they always make me laugh. It's lucky to be able to laugh at the police.

Evening standard has a front page today about Lawrence family spying. People clutch them like shields. There is a debate going on in front of the station, "the police are people too, this guy has parents" he says prodding at the mans badge. No one seems convinced.

Then the most beautiful photo call you ever saw with folk wielding the standard headline. Protesters are picking up issues and handing them out. For the first time ever the Evening standard is an ally at a protest.

I'm at the police station, there is an ambulance here being let into station. Policemen with subway sandwiches follow afterwards.

Some people are making a documentary - for Vice. They are talking about today as a "gentrification issue". They don't reckon there's enough in it for a video. They decide to call it a day "it's getting cold now".

4. Soup Kitchen November 16th 2015

The kitchen was full when I arrived, between them Jacob, Mo & Jay take up a lot of room. Jacob asked me how my degree was going "Degree?!" said Mo "Man's doing a PhD – that's like the top top top degree" Matthew asked me if it was the same as a doctorate and they made a fuss over the fact I'm going to be a dr. Mo continued explaining to Jacob "He's got to write a book next year, 100,000 words!". I felt embarrassed to be cast in the role of really smart person, particularly by a group of people who I have come to greatly admire for their tenacity and hard work. I however am just cruising along – hoping to find academic success based in

part on the lives they have chose. Mo and Jacob sign on, they both do more than ten hours voluntary work every day.

When I start playing cards Jay is on the phone trying to secure a venue for an upcoming Soup Kitchen fund raiser. I heard him on the phone the other day, he was pissed off with someone but refused to get angry “To be honest” he had said “Every time I try to call you you are busy and it is making me annoyed, you need to make time for this conversation”. After that I had congratulated him on how impressive and firm he had sounded on the phone – I find phone calls difficult, and it is impressive to see someone offering controlled anger to people they are doing business with as it can be hard to strike a balance. He said to me then “You see Sam, growing up as I did, on the streets, I need to be careful because I’m used to telling people what I think and getting angry”.

Anyway he was on the phone speaking to a venue called ---- trying to book their space. Jay has a lot of experience as a promoter and has run nights all over London. I listen when I hear him saying “This is the thing isn’t it – gentrification” then the person at the other end says something “No I understand I’m not blaming you its just...”. As he came off the phone he explained to us that he had been told that their license stipulated no hip-hop r&B or pop. Which sounded absurd, he hadn’t heard anything like this before either – and put it down to gentrification. “I dunno if it is really in their license, but they obviously don’t want us there”.

After a while of playing cards – midway through a match actually, Jay came to get me to introduce me to a new volunteer. A white woman about my age who I had clocked as she came in as she was dressed quite smartly. Jay said “Molly will be accompanying you to pick up the pizzas” sometimes Jay quite sweetly uses formal language like “accompanying”. After finishing another game or two she came out and introduced herself. By now Natalie, Laurie, another service user and I were all playing cards together. The woman and her friend who had joined her were quite nervous. I asked her what she did and she explained that she was a singer and she was writing her new record. It eventually became clear that she was quite successful and I remember her single being in the charts etc...

On the way back from Franco Manca I spoke to her for a while. We were were walking past the Hip Hop Fish and Chip Shop which has been controversial and I made a comment to that effect. Further on she said that she thought some gentrification was ok but sometimes it went too far. However the protests against Champagne and Fromage were singled out as being too much – they are just business people – *they are French* – and the protesters probably weren’t even from Brixton, just middle class lefties. She seemed quite naïve about the situation. Most people I know that grew up in south London have stronger views on the matter.

But she was clearly someone that wanted to be doing something useful, and was aware of the challenges of doing voluntary work. She asked me how I thought it was best to speak to service users!

4.3 Brixton Soup Kitchen November 23rd 2015

There was a lot of conspiracy theory talk today at the soup kitchen. I arrived and there was a long discussion already ongoing between Laurie and Carl about Islamic State and government desire to cut population.

A little later on a really interesting discussion started up about drugs. A guy whose name I don't know asked whether Cynthia was taking any medication. I was busy talking to her about films we like (midnight express, or was it midnight cowboy, is her favourite). She was also worried as someone had told her that drinking lemon in boiling water was bad for her. We agreed that one lemon and three green teas a day was probably ok, she checked with Jacob and he also agreed. Anything in moderation.

Anyway this guy was reading about adhd diagnoses and began an outraged description of the problem with drug companies. Over prescribing for mental illnesses that weren't even real anyway. The way he put it made it seem that he was doubting the existence of mental illness, which a pregnant woman at the table disagreed with. He moderated his stance trying to explain it was an issue of over diagnosis in order to sell drugs. He cited a study in Finland that found counselling was the key to overcoming mental illness and that schizophrenia was usually caused by childhood trauma. I was a bit worried about Cynthia's reaction to this. Though I now realise I forgot to check in with her before she went. She can take small comments very seriously.

Other people became involved in the conversation – notably Carl who brought up the suggestion that everyone who died of swine flu had been vaccinated against it. He also said that ebola was man-made and people are poisoning our food. Vaccinations are killing us. Cynthia said quietly that they were probably trying to get rid of all the poor people.

Later on I was standing in the kitchen chatting some new volunteers – or at least people I hadn't met before, two muslim women. Young mothers. "I'm not giving my kids any vaccinations" one said "I don't want doctors putting anything in that can't be taken out again".

Big veg delivery today "I saw a black tomato" people were grabbing for the weird coloured carrots, I explained they were initially bred to be orange by dutch. One carrot looked like a naked man below the waist. Which caused a lot of laughing amongst the volunteers – me included obviously. "I don't want to eat a black

tomato or a black carrot” Neil said, seemingly appalled by the whole idea, even more so when I explained this was fashionable and quite expensive!

Neil and I had a chat about Kids Company – he was doing outreach that night trying to track down young people who had been ‘lost’ after Kids Company disbanded. He felt furious that they had been closed, and also at the way that the charity had been run. Now he was trying to get young people to fill out questionnaires and to record their details in an attempt to measure impact. He was dubious about the politics of getting details of young people “they deserve their privacy” But keen to be involved in the work to remedy the situation left following Kids Company’s demise. We talked a little about the funding struggles of soup kitchen – though Neil was optimistic about them. People come and they think cos we’re boys from the street that we’re selling drugs here or whatever but we’re not we’re just trying to do something good!!

Appendix 5: Extract from transcript of interview with Mary

We moved to Brixton after university. At the time it was an area which was close to where we were living in south London already and there was a lot of nightlife here, so for our student selves, that really appealed.

We moved to separate houses Hannah and I, electric avenue and railton road. And we used to go to the Rec every Monday for soca aerobics and then Hannah and I would go back to one another’s flats after that class and cook to each other. We joked to each other about it being called ----- because we’d always make salads because it was like our fitness day and we were feeling righteous. Then they’d get more and more elaborate and we’d always use ingredients from the market often at noon because that was the only place that would be open after aerobics, and we started to get to know the shopkeepers there as well, we started to get familiar with these unusual ingredients and start eating differently to how we were eating at university, we were still on a budget because we didn’t have very well paid jobs. So we kind of started discovering how fun it could be to cook on a budget with a market near by, and we’d never lived near a market like this. That was what formed the suppers, and then we decided to turn that into a blog because we were both in very very boring desk jobs at the time so we had a lot of procrastination time, blogs were just geeky things at that time this was 2007, 2008. We didn’t really know how to do it so we just looked up wordpress and we set up ----- the blog which is what we called ourselves back then or what we called the blog. Then we went to a supper club in dalston, one of the first ones, it was Japanese based, we thought we could do the same thing in Hannah’s flat because it had a big living space and it was right above the market so perfect for supper clubs.

We announced the tickets on social media, twitter and facebook which were all, twitter was only just starting, so we were really lucky, developments in the internet really helped us at the time. There were only ten supper

clubs in London at that time. Now there's hundreds, so we started that and it was full first night and we just rolled with it so we did it every Saturday and it became our regular Saturday for 6 months.

Ellie moved house and we couldn't do the supper clubs anymore because her new flat was the wrong shape for big groups, so we decided to do street food and again something that was happening for the first time,

We stood in a yard and designed the wrap, we did a few festivals and events, after that summer of doing festivals and events we came back and saw a sign on this house saying for sale, went to the market management and signed a license and that's how the restaurant was born. We didn't want to call it ----- because confusing connotations, we were writing a book around that time as well because the blog won an award so this coincided with the end of the production of that book.

We opened this as that book was released so it was good timing.

What was it like here – you were in the second wave of traders

We weren't here as the spacemakers thing happened, we opened at the same time as Mama Lan, just after. Honest, it was, I don't think we were that welcome at first by ----- over there because he had his eye on this. There was a bit of a stand off at the beginning, ----- was playing some very aggressive music and we were like we were quite open about our dislike for the music, and we were like can you turn it down. Our neighbourly relationship wasn't brilliant from the start and now we're really good friends.

We were so busy keeping our heads down working, we just had to get this place open, we invited anyone that came by in to try it out but I feel like some of the traditional traders don't find it approachable maybe because some of the pricepoints and the way it looks but I think, do you mean how was it in terms of relations,

What was it like did you know the other businesses

We knew Cornercopia because we'd done a pop up there back in 2010 so we had a few, and we knew the guys at Federation. We were very welcome in terms of people knew that we were members of the community. There are bigger names who've come in since then who haven't started their business in Brixton or don't live in Brixton so it was very easy to become part of the community quite quickly. Was it fun, was it successful at first?

It took a while, a lot of experimentation and adapting of prices and promotion, we didn't really have a promotion budget, we were lucky we were in a place with high footfall and we're still not in a perfect position in the market I think this end is the one that needs the most work to pull people down. We didn't lose money, which is great for a restaurant, we broke even for a while and then we started making profit. So it was a great move and it was really fun and it was lovely to be part of something where everyone knew each other and everyone kind of was in the same boat, but it also was tricky with the landlords and realising that we didn't have any security.

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