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Repackaging the Inner City: Historic Preservation, Community Development and the Emergent Cultural Quarter in London

By

Nityanand Deckha

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Doctor of Philosophy

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

George E. Marcus, Professor. Chair
Anthropology

James D. Faubion, Associate Professor
Anthropology

Jean-Joseph Goux, L.H. Favrot Professor of French, French Studies

Fares el-Dahdah, Assistant Professor
School of Architecture

Betty Joseph, Assistant Professor
English

Houston, Texas

April 2000
ABSTRACT

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By

Nityanand Deckha

I trace the transformation of two inner-city districts in London from semi-derelict industrial areas to emerging showcases of cultural enterprise, King’s Cross, the site of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link terminus and Spitalfields, east of the financial district. By using a methodological mélange that includes a host of interviews, first-hand observation and volunteer work at a community planning group over a year and a half, I explain how various efforts at historic preservation, community planning, economic development and, increasingly, promoting cultural activities have produced this transformation. Rather than focusing on gentrification or working-class displacement, I look at how these efforts have mobilized ‘urbanist agency,’ that is, of people such as architects, architectural historians, community activists, non-profit developers, planners and cultural entrepreneurs, who have become actively engaged in the production, preservation, and revitalization of inner-city spaces. Such agency not only recasts the popular image of the inner city. It also repositions it in a service economy led by explosive growth in the financial and cultural sectors. In fact, it is in repackaged inner city areas such as King’s Cross and Spitalfields where we can most clearly discern the spatial effects of this increasingly global economy.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my dear uncle, the late Vasant Prabhakar Bhapkar, Professor of Statistics, who had always listened to me with interest and affection, and who will not see these pages.

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PREFACE

I arrived at Heathrow with two suitcases on August 16, 1997 to do fieldwork for my dissertation. The date was something of planned coincidence, since my parents, sister and I immigrated to Canada on the same day in 1974. So, sitting on the 'Airbus' shuttle that would take me from Heathrow to Euston station, near the University College London residence where I would stay while I looked for a more permanent place to live, provided an opportunity to ask myself why I had come to London.

Throughout the course of my life, including my years as a graduate student, I've thought of London as an unexplored home. I was born there in 1970, but we moved to India for a year after my sister was born in 1972, and then left Britain permanently in 1974. My parents sailed from Bombay to London over seventeen days in 1961, and thus lived and worked in Britain for over a decade. Their memories of London and England remain vivid after all these years, related in repeated stories as well as forming a pile of photo albums in a living room cabinet, and several reels of film in an upstairs closet. Their London memories remain rich despite not returning to London, except for stopovers on the way to Bombay. My sister and I went for three weeks in the summer of 1987 to visit old family friends. In addition, I spent a month over June and July 1996.

Only a year separates that visit from the beginning of fieldwork. Yet, the projects that shaped those visits were very different. In 1996, I was still committed to my earlier dissertation project investigating the role of nineteenth-century colonial
missionary education in Western India. I wanted to trace the relationship between
the expansion of education beyond the upper-castes and the production, over the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of emancipatory discourses among non-
Brahmans and eventually tribals. I was in Britain to do archival research; a month in
London to consult the India Office Records, then at Orbit House, near Waterloo
station, followed by a month in Edinburgh to pour over tracts from Scottish
missionaries, who, like many other Scots, were prominent in colonial administration.
For fieldwork, I had chosen to investigate the radical politics of education and social
activism among tribal groups in the Bombay hinterland.

In the lead-up time to this visit, I had focused on the then trendy, emerging
field of postcolonial (largely literary) criticism. I saw my fieldwork as an
opportunity to obtain first-hand knowledge that I could refract through the prism of
postcolonial theory, and vice-versa. However, in London and Edinburgh, I soon
discovered that I was less curious of delving into the archives than I was on
observing the relationships between Londoners and Edinburghers and how they
moved about and dwelled in urban space.

In Houston, where I came to pursue a Ph.D. in anthropology in 1994, people
are dispersed rather than concentrated. There was little sense of a downtown or
central core – although by 1999 this was changing - only a burgeoning growth of
strip malls, highways, and tract home subdivisions. Of course, Houston has its
architectural and horticultural surprises. However, generally, its sprawling and flat
landscape make landmarks few and far between, leaving most people to go about
their everyday life in relatively banal environments.
Until then, I had thought of my disaffection and inability to connect in Houston a personal fault. However, after London and Edinburgh, I became curious of how a city’s physical environment supported various kinds of activities – such as cinemas, bookstores, street markets, corner bakeries, lounge bars -- that made for an active street life in which spontaneous excursions and accidental meetings were possible. I felt immediacy and a sense of purpose with these questions of urban life and space that I hadn’t with the non-Brahman or tribal. This was despite the extended involvement my maternal grandparents, granduncles, and great granduncle had with the non-Brahman and then anti-colonial political and social movements in western Maharashtra from the late nineteenth century.

I carried my nascent interest in urban space into exploring the Bloomsbury Group and their relationships between affect, aesthetic practices and space. I came to the Bloomsberries in a rather roundabout way. That fall, my fellow students and I were preparing papers for a departmental conference on Kinship and Cosmopolitanism. I was loath to tell the story of my own extended family. Instead, I wanted to deploy the quintessential anthropological notion of kinship to explain how familial linkages could shape subjectivity as well as aesthetic and political practices.

During that same fall, I happened to see again Hanif Kureishi and Stephen Frears’s 1988 film Sammy and Rosie Get Laid. To my mind, the film stages the complexity of ethical stances, political positions, and sexual, racial and class identities at the height of Thatcherism in relation to shifting definitions of social and urban space. The bulk of the action takes place in specific bedrooms, kitchens,
living rooms and a restaurant, against the repeated backdrop of a decaying and increasingly brutal London. What was peculiar was the insertion of the persona of Virginia Woolf into the montage and narrative of the film in two occasions. My curiosity peaked, I began to read criticism of the film, including an essay by the pre-eminent postcolonial critic, Gayatri Spivak (1993).

In her article, Spivak deploys Raymond Williams's notion of the Bloomsbury Group as a class fraction that embodied the early twentieth century notion of the civilized individual, whose tenets, the more it was repeated, become increasingly ideological. Spivak's oblique use of Williams's criticism only increased my curiosity of the significance of the Bloomsbury Group to the multicultural politics of identity and sexuality staged in Sammy and Rosie. It led me to read Williams's essay, "The Bloomsbury Fraction," (1980) which then took me to the diaries, letters, and essays of several of the Bloomsberries.

Amidst the cornucopia of late Victorian and Edwardian intellectual and literary life, two factors struck me: one, the extent to which the male relatives of Virginia Woolf and her sister, Vanessa Bell, as well as Lytton Strachey, and his first cousin, the painter Duncan Grant, served in high-ranking administrative and military posts in colonial India; and two, the significant role of social space – one only has to think of a Room of One's Own – in defining the conscious shift from Kensington, emblematic of the upper-middle class Victorian world in which Woolf, Bell and Strachey were raised and from which they descended, to taking up rooms in the then decidedly inappropriate Bloomsbury district. How these factors affected the aesthetic and political identities and practices of the Bloomsbury Group became not
only the subject of a paper, but a prelude to the investigations of London urban space that I gather and narrate in this dissertation.

In addition, there are strong disciplinary and intellectual reasons to do fieldwork in London. First, in most academic works, whether conservative social histories or radical postcolonial criticism, London signifies the past. In academic anthropology, where geographic and linguistic niches are still required, Britain is seen as too similar to the United States (and thus too unexotic) as a fieldwork site. Yet, during the late 1990s, with the growing integration of Europe and a strengthening national economy, particularly in the financial and cultural service sectors, the profile of Britain has risen, and London – whether as global city, creative city, capital of cool – finds itself often in the spotlight.

The transformation of Britain’s national image, suggested in the media slogan ‘Cool Britannia,’ is itself a symptom of Tony Blair’s New Labour government and its attempts to reposition Britain in a globalized economy. I began fieldwork only a few months after Blair’s election in May 1997. As such, Repackaging the Inner City is situated within the first year and a half of Blair’s rule and can be read as an ethnography that analyzes the effects of New Labour and Cool Britannia on the ongoing transformations of two districts on the fringe of Central London: King’s Cross, N1 and Spitalfields, E1. It endeavors to understand change in these formerly industrial, inner city districts as effects of global shifts in capitalist production and consumption. However, rather than paint a grim picture of working-class and immigrant displacement by ongoing gentrification or celebrate the
spectacularization of the everyday living and workings spaces of the Western city, it focuses on the process of urban change and the range of actors who entangle themselves within it.

In my discussions, the inner city is a specific historic and spatial form, placed between greener, more spacious, more exclusively residential inner and outer suburbs and the downtown or central financial, cultural, educational and retail district. In the case of London, it is a fringe outside the West End and the City, as well as the South Bank cultural complex across Westminster. Historically, this fringe has maintained a diversity of industrial, residential and small commercial uses and was home to industrial London’s working classes, before the advent of the railways and the Underground dispersed them. It has, especially with the case of the East End, been the first home of immigrants.

Since the 1960s, the loss of manufacturing and the shift from rail to road haulage have greatly affected these inner city areas, many of them near London’s major railway stations and goods yards. While their residential and working populations declined, their public housing became more transient and more multiracial. Furthermore, their buildings and terrace houses fell into disrepair and disuse. Yet, despite this social and economic decline, these inner London areas were not the abandoned, wrecked and violent areas that ‘inner city’ conjures in American discussions.

I pick up the story of the inner city largely from the late 1970s onwards. My interest lies not so much in tracing the lives of inner city Londoners as examining the contexts in which some of these Londoners transform everyday spaces, and the
strategies and practices they deploy to do it. Hence, *Repackaging the Inner City* is an ethnography of London, but an ethnography of this metropolitan and global city focused on two of its changing fringe areas that does not seek to discover "Londoners." Instead, I deploy ethnographic methods of participant observation and creating networks of communicants to analyze the deployment of a range of strategies from the 1970s that have endeavored to revitalize the inner city, focusing on historic preservation, community development and the emergent cultural quarters in King’s Cross and Spitalfields. I use ethnography, in this way, to elaborate what I call "urbanist agency."

By urbanist, I would include people self-consciously and (potentially) reflexively involved, as either as amateurs or professionals, within public, private, or non-profit activities, in the shaping of city spaces and, subsequently in managing, preserving, enriching, and transforming them. This takes in the bulk of the Londoners I spoke with during my time there. With some, I had several encounters, in their homes and offices or at meetings. With those with whom I worked with at King’s Cross -- as a volunteer for the main, local organization that has, for a decade, fought for a more community-sensitive regeneration of the Railway Lands that extend northwards behind King’s Cross and St Pancras railway stations and forms the backyard of the new British Library -- I had frequent contact. All these Londoners, either professionally and voluntarily, and often in both capacities, are involved in the metropolis’ shifting urbanism, whether as conservationists, architects, architectural historians, non-profit community developers, regeneration executives, community planners, or housing activists.
Yet, I knew that narrating agency was not so much a new research problem for me as it was an old one given shape and life. Agency was at the core of my earlier work on diasporic, migrant and postcolonial subjectivity. Then, trying to work with Spivak’s deconstructionist postcolonial theory, I kept floundering on the dilemma of voice and communication between an idealized ethnographer and informant: that is, the phonocentrism of the interview, that informant speech stands in, is equivalent to, the informant’s consciousness and agency, and the working notion that clear and open exchange between the ethnographer and informant, despite asymmetric power relations, is always possible. There, I got caught in locating agency within the space between ethnographer and informant. In London, by talking informally and on tape, and by working with a range of urbanist agents – preservationists, architects, community planners and activists, directors of non-profit development trusts – I began to think of agency as an object that was produced through linkages of human communication and action, independent of the ethnographer. The problems of miscommunication and action – whether the creation of a preservation area, or effective public consultation, or leveraging government grants to refurbish workspaces, or developing a strategy to promote urban tourism -- provide examples of vital acts which could be interestingly framed and articulated within a larger narrative – an ethnographic one.

I use “urbanist agency” to tell the story of how King’s Cross, on the northern fringe of central London, and Spitalfields, on its eastern flank, have been changing from declining or semi-derelict industrial districts into cultural and entertainment quarters. In order to narrate this change, I’ve relied on a handful of practices that
have become familiar, even institutionalized, in the repackaging of the inner city, not only in London, but in other Western European and North American cities; namely, historic preservation or conservation, community development and planning, partnering across the public and private sectors, and the emergence of cultural enterprises. Although these practices have become interwoven into the fabric of a transforming King’s Cross and Spitalfields, I have tried to thematize chapters around the practices of specific urbanist agents.

Chapter Two focuses on London’s network of historic conservationists. Here, I look at historic conservation as a specific practice that can be understood as a class-marked politics of aesthetics expressed in urban space. Yet this aesthetic politics is not only one of private, privileged subjectivity. It also is marked in public policy on conservation and heritage, in which discrete buildings and structures have been the focus of preservation at the expense of the local cityscape more generally. This invariably gives conservation both its art-historical approach to buildings, reifying them as museum pieces or artifacts, rather than treating them more in terms of social history and contemporary use.

The class-marked nature of conservation finds its limits, I argue, in the social, cultural and racial diversity of inner-city London. Nonetheless, it would be unfair to describe the agency of conservationists as derived from snobbery or elitism. More accurate would be a notion of agency that is shaped by architectural and/or historical education and a strong interest in the built heritage, and a desire to safeguard this heritage through a set of well-defined procedures.
This desire to preserve the built environment supercedes more vigorous political positionings vis-à-vis, for example, the central government, big business, and property developers. This is in direct contrast to the community activists and planners at the King’s Cross Railway Lands Group who have been opposing the coming of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) from France into London at King’s Cross for over a decade, and who have undertaken local consultation to devise an alternative, more sensitive planning strategy for the area.

At King’s Cross, as I describe in Chapters Three and Five, notions of community and locality have been hardened by the “us-and-them” character of the Thatcherite 1980s, which saw, among other things, the increasing disenfranchisement of the working class. The subjectivity of many of the participants of the King’s Cross Railway Lands Group reflect this disenfranchisement. Moreover, this is further reflected in the problems the group currently faces in terms of communicating their mission to, on the one hand, an increasingly multicultural King’s Cross, and on the other, in the push for entrepreneurial solutions to inner-city revitalization. This is represented by the group’s better organized and much richer foe, the King’s Cross Partnership, the local public-private collaborative overseeing the district’s regeneration.

I capture the markedly different spirit of this mixture of community politics and entrepreneurialism in Chapter Four with my interview with Kay Jordan, director of the Spitalfields Small Business Association and more ironically, in Chapter Five, with the story of the former Battlebridge Centre and its charismatic founder, Julie Lowe. Both women share earlier active involvement in former hard-edged politics
(Kay as a communist; Julie as an eco-feminist) and both make their mark in redefining “business in the community,” itself the former name of a program run by Prince Charles’s office in the effort to match community groups with private sector resources.

At Spitalfields, the SSBA has refurbished derelict housing and workspace for its increasingly Bangladeshi membership, created construction jobs for local East Enders, and has employment and skills training programs. The SSBA represents well what leaders in the non-profit and community sectors increasingly call “social entrepreneurship”: building community as they build the local economy. At Battlebridge, Julie’s efforts to build an eco-village in a bus repair depot behind King’s Cross station never fully realized its urban environmentalist vision. Antagonizing the local residents, Battlebridge was more successful in showcasing entrepreneurship in a risky area than developing community linkages, especially in its nighttime uses for cultural events. Nonetheless, both SSBA and Battlebridge represent creative attempts to link the politics of community building to the pragmatics of asset generation; that is, anchoring, rather than displacing local residents from their inner-city everyday spaces of living and working.

This anchoring heralds a less-alienated urban life even as it recognizes that the burgeoning growth of cultural quarters is key to the viability of the inner city as a thriving and diverse commercial and residential zone in the global city. As such, it introduces a new way of inhabiting London, one simultaneously localist yet resonant with repackaged inner city districts in the hearts of Western cities. Moreover, as
cultural quarters, the repackaged inner city spatially affirms the leading sectors in the
global city as a mixture of financial and cultural services, with tourism thrown in.

This repackaging is a compromise made by urbanist agents in places like
King's Cross and Spitalfields. Yet, to evoke the words of the director of the
Victorian Society when asked about the changing climate of conservationism in
Britain, it is a compromise in order to stay in the game. Moreover, that compromise
leaves the inner city dwellers in place in their neighborhoods, perhaps ambivalent to
their ability to shape alternative futures. Yet, this is preferable to the displacement
of populations and the destruction of the specific intimacy of urban landscapes that
linger in older, hopefully bygone paradigms of urban renewal.

I should mention that the Londoners I interviewed and interacted with are not
a cross-section of the contemporary populace. In fact, they are, with very few
exceptions, white Londoners. They are of course Black and Asian Londoners who
are working as community activists in the inner cities, picking up the slack of a
withering welfare state. They work, as several of them described to me, one rather
exasperatedly, in a 'contract culture' where they strive to deliver social, educational,
health, and leisure services to their clients, especially the elderly and youth.
Although they work in the transforming and repackaging inner city, and despite the
various political positions they voice and support, I would insist that they are not
urbanist agents.

This seems counterintuitive for the contemporary urban ethnographer,
especially one who himself is a son of migrant Indians. Yet despite my previous
academic interest in diasporic, migrant, and postcolonial theory, my many years of involvement in diasporic cultural formations as a student in Montreal, Toronto and Houston, I am increasingly averse to using brown and black migrants as tokens of urban marginalia or resistance.

Allow me to offer two vignettes that may bring the point home. At the 1995 Postcolonialism and Psychoanalysis conference, organized by the then new Association for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society, and which included among the illuminati, Slavoj Žižek, Joan Copjec, Juliet Flower MacCannell, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak began her talk on the figure of the breast in Kleinian psychoanalysis and in the writing of ‘woman’ in Indian writer’s Mahasweta Devi’s fiction, with the words, "I never said postcolonialism." With this, Spivak pointed to how the theorization of postcoloniality, itself a deconstructive and poststructuralist way of reading colonial texts, had become institutionalized and normalized in the humanities. Since postcolonial theory is identified with her, along with Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, her point may be simply salutary. But, to her audience, the diasporic and postcolonial critics in the making, and, for me, as a graduate student long interested in developing a postcolonial ethnographic method, it marked a turning point.

Another one came not a year later, in the summer of 1996 at the International Literature and Ethics Conference in Aberystwyth, Wales. I was in London and Edinburgh, as I’ve described, to do archival research on my previous dissertation project. During a lunchtime conversation with an Asian American man who was finishing his doctorate in Comparative Literature at Cornell, I complained about the
complacency and conservatism of Asian migrants and their children. He replied, without a hint of irony, "But they create wealth."

His comments rang clear during my fieldwork experiences, where, while thinking about King's Cross and Spitalfields and their social and economic regeneration, I had to ponder the inscription of the Asian migrant in globalized systems of capital. I would conclude that, in considering the specific context of East London Bangladeshis in the restaurant and garment industries -- it is more meaningful to ask about how migrant capital grafts onto the Western metropolis than to showcase identity. So, for example, in Spitalfields, an ethnography of shifting metropolitan urbanism would have to involve conversations with the shopkeepers, workers and owners of small businesses, and the producers in the locally vibrant Asian cultural industries, particularly music recording, but also film, television, radio, and fashion design.

But would this be "urbanist agency?" It could, say, in a Asian-owned property development company. But how critical or reflexive would this be? How would it participate in public, private and non-sector partnerships to regenerate Spitalfields, or for that matter, the Black Londoner inner city neighborhoods in Dalston or Brixton? Would Asian and Black conservationists, community architects and planners emerge as players? Indeed, there are interesting and important questions, and for now, must remain at the horizon, notes towards a blueprint of a future project.

I would like to draw to close by admitting that this doctoral dissertation would have been a very different undertaking had it been written during Thatcher's
time. Then, there would have been less cause for optimism, politically as well as
twriterly, for the kinds of urban developments that are taking place in the innards of
the British capital. Analysts of the city would be expected to focus on racial
rebellion on housing estates, gentrification, and Thatcher's famous right-to-buy
schemes that gave a helping hand to many working-class families as it took more
public housing out of the control of the local authority or council. The lines drawn
would be familiar, if not crystal-clear: Tory against Labour, Right against Left,
White against Black, the City against the Country, the venerable British phrase, Us
and Them.

Of course, the effects of the 1980s have made strong imprints on the public
policies and social and cultural formations of the 1990s. Moreover, they linger in
the rhetorics of community and oppositional politics at King's Cross, and the
slogans, 'value for money' and 'best practice,' both of which have become
institutionalized in the managing systems of non-profit organizations such as the
King's Cross Railway Lands Group and the Spitalfields Small Business Association.
Another of Thatcher's notions, 'Enterprise Culture' has found an attractive audience
among the cultural impresarios and practitioners, Asian, Black, and White alike, in
the repackaging of the inner city as cultural quarter, which I discuss in Chapter Six.

But, I'd like to think that the most poignant reflection of the effect of the
1980s -- and here, I would interject the anthropological critiques for which my
department at Rice is well-known (i.e., Clifford and Marcus, ed., 1986, Marcus and
Fischer 1986) -- is the production of the part-ironic, part-nostalgic subject/consumer
of urban space. I try to capture this in my fiction interludes, "Am I a Tourist?" in
Chapter One, “Repackaging the East End” in Chapter Six, and in much of Chapter Five, “Making Money in the Muck?: Urban Environmentalism at the Battlebridge Centre, King’s Cross.” More than the networks of communicants established through phone calls, meetings and the bundle of interviews, more than the time spent at the King’s Cross Railway Lands Group, these interludes refract my entire experience of fieldwork in the space of a few passages. I have written them in a language and style that is more than merely salutary to self-reflexivity, gaining meaning through their intertextual placement within a set of narratives that are (hopefully) discernible as ethnography. To me, they remind me, and hopefully the reader, of the entangling of everyday lives in which ethnography finds its stage, and of the continual sculpting of ‘form’ (i.e., the interview, the photograph, observations at a party) with ‘content,’ that is, the narratives of various kinds of urbanist agencies which together have repackaged that object known as the inner city.

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1 The paper, written for the Kinship and Cosmopolitanism conference in spring 1997, was entitled “The Ethics Of Affect: The Public Politics of Intimacy in the Bloomsbury Group and Sammy And Rosie Get Laid.” Along with the other conference papers, it is currently being published, under the editorship of conference organizer (and dissertation advisor) James D. Faubion as The Ethics of Kinship, Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham, NJ.
CHAPTER ONE
ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE GLOBAL CITY

(Image 1) Central London, according to the Lonely Planet™: King's Cross and Spitalfields are respectively north and east of the city's core districts.

Given that the heart of anthropology has always been to produce knowledge of the Other, it is at best rare, at worst, absurd, to focus one's ethnographic lens on London. Of course, within British debates around urban regeneration, globalization, and new economic arrangements, London does claim a stage. Moreover, given its elevation, with New York and Tokyo, as one of the three chief command centers in a globalized financial services industry by Sassen (1991), and growing attention in the
popular press and the New Labour government to the various 'cultural industries,' London offers a rich terrain to shape a variety of projects. These may concern, for example, the nexus of global financial and cultural flows, the impact of a service-based economy on local urbanism, and the narratives of everyday life in a global and 'creative' city that is also the capital of one's of the world's most significant governments, the hub of what was the largest empire, and now home to a wide range of migrants with origins from sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East, refugees from around the world, as well as expatriates from Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand.

Although ethnographies that pay attention to the globalized economies of finance and culture are increasingly de rigueur among cutting-edge, critical anthropologists, we have few ethnographies at present that capture the processes which shape the everyday urban environment for citizens of the global city. In addition, we have none to my knowledge that frame the actors of local urbanisms – historic preservationists, non-profit community developers, cultural producers, community planners and activists – in the ongoing production of the global city. This is the task I take up, as I seek to imagine an ethnographic practice at the turn of the twenty-first century from the everyday spaces and practices of the Londoner.

Except for the forays into East End kinship structures in the 1950s and a more general theory of English connectedness in the 1980s (i.e., Young and Wilmott 1957; Strathern 1992), and notwithstanding the recent collections by British anthropologists on 'working at home' (Jackson, ed., 1987), there are no
ethnographies of London to respond to or criticize. Instead, I have had to rely on a heterodox hodge-podge of allusions to contemporary London in which to locate and differentiate my ethnography. I've drawn from the novels of Iain Sinclair, the films of Mike Leigh and Hanif Kureishi, the analytical essays of Patrick Wright, and countless journalist pieces in The Guardian, The Times and The Spectator. I've scattered these among my conversations with my fieldwork interlocutors, variously active in historic conservation, community development and planning, small enterprise, the nascent cultural sector and urban regeneration to shape my ethnography of London. This may in the end be a testament to the strength of the ethnographic method as a technique of social research and analytical writing. Certainly, I hope that in applying ethnography in a context vastly different from to which it is traditionally accustomed, I attest to its elasticity and applicability for investigating an increasingly globalized and image-saturated world.

I am not alone in my efforts to resituate ethnography and anthropology. Arjun Appadurai has for some time been trying to adapt anthropology to the study of modernity and globalization (1990; 1996). George Marcus has for more than a decade tried to work from the "inside out," as it were, detailing methodological tactics that strive to better narrate ethnographic stories, the stories and the ethnographers themselves caught within a global world system (Marcus 1995; 1998). Concomitant to and a product of this system, with its globalized circuits of capital, cultural, information and labor flows, is the city. Indeed, it is in the experiences of everyday spaces, whether walking, driving, or taking public transport where these
flows materialize themselves to us, coagulating to form a gleaming office tower here, a new Internet café there.

How and where these global flows are localized in the urban landscape is receiving attention by a growing range of scholars. Following Jameson (1984), we have come to look at some of the most glaring of these localizations as emblematic of postmodern capitalist culture. Some architectural theorists such as Beatriz Colomina (1994) theorize the architecture and design of city spaces as signs in a visual global cultural economy. Others, such as M Christine Boyer (1998) trace the history of American urban planning to illustrate how contemporary cityscapes, from financial districts to reclaimed waterfronts, are increasingly sets of ahistorical aestheticized tableaux that banish collective memory and enshrine tourism as the mode of urban experience.

Among sociologists and geographers the urban is a pre-eminent locus in which to analyze the ‘flexible accumulation’ of late capitalist production (Harvey 1985, 1989; Lash and Urry 1987), the expansion of the financial, communications and cultural industries (Lash and Urry 1994), and the networks of migrant labor from Latin America, Africa and Asia to the ‘West’ that have transformed the socioscapes of contemporary metropolises. Los Angeles is the quintessential example of this transformation (Davis 1990; Dear et al, eds. 1996; Scott and Soja, eds. 1996; Soja 1989, 1996). But, vast cultural and social heterogeneity also has become everyday in cities such as Toronto, New York, Chicago, Washington, Houston, Vancouver, Sydney, Paris, and, of course, London. The experience of this social and cultural transformation in the life of major Western cities has fed into the growth of a range
of identity and cultural politics, and has found academic expression in debates around race, gender, sexuality, nationalism, place and postcoloniality.

Although these debates articulate anew questions about community, solidarity, affinity and citizenship against the increasingly sterile notion of "Western liberal democracy" – surely issues that are of interest to anthropologists – there has been very little attention to the anthropology of cities and the role of ethnography in constellating the changing everyday urban landscape in global capitalism (Low 1996). Furthermore, despite its prominence in discussions about the global city or globalized music, or in the literature and film of diaspora and postcoloniality, London is exotic to anthropologists.

The place of fieldwork fixes an emotional landscape for the ethnographer, and I am no exception. London’s residual imperial significations offer to satisfy a desire for the South Asian migrant raised in North America, like myself, and the postcolonial South Asian, an “origin” or “center.” For the postcolonialist, London’s British Library India Office Collection embodies the archive through which Britain’s colonial apparatus can be repeatedly resurrected. Ironically, the India Office records provide an immobile point of dissemination through which our elaborate theories of subalternity and postcoloniality have been spun. Yet, this quest for origins is a risky venture with the lure of unchecked romanticism at every corner.

Materially, this archive is also spatially inscribed in an inner London landscape still containing the dockyards, warehouses and marketplaces in which goods from the colonies were transported, stored and traded. In a global cultural economy of fast-circulating objects that are often either disposable or rapidly
obsolete, London’s urban landscape – much of it preserved and adapted for re-use, but a substantial part of it derelict, redundant, or under-used – can provide a critical terrain for thematizing urbanisms in the global city that is both historical and look to the future. However, given the rhetoric of pastiche and the romance of past architectural styles which postmodern urban design has mobilized, we need to be careful in our understanding of how London’s industrial residues affect its contemporary urbanism.

Foucault (1977) encourages us to think of history’s purpose, “guided by genealogy,” as one that opposes itself to the production of what Nietzsche described as antiquarian history. Such history “seeks the continuities of soil, language, and urban life in which our present is rooted and, ‘by cultivating in a delicate manner that which existed for all time, it tries to conserve for posterity the conditions under which we were born’.”¹ Indeed, within the context of urbanism that seeks to reclaim and regenerate the inner city, the uses of historic preservation can be castigated as precisely this cultivation for continuity. More generally, attempts to reconstitute notions of public spheres and spaces, especially in the United States where they seem most absent, reveal nostalgic desires to project into the future a city developed not only in an earlier era but elsewhere (for discussion, see Boyer 1998; Rybczynski 1995; Sorkin, ed. 1992).

In an effort to rethink the metropolis through Houston, Lars Lerup laments the extent to which such urbanist discourses “remain haunted by the irrelevant ghost of the historically outdated European city” (1994: 87). Lerup argues that the symptoms of this haunting – the valorization of the pedestrian, the hegemony of “the
plaza, the street, and the perimeter block” – run through “even the most sophisticated readings (and the occasional building) of the American city and its postwar expansions.” They, he continues:

are predicated on a more or less hidden positivity that, if fulfilled, would bring us “community” – or bring us back to the American version of the European city. Yet the City is forever surpassed by the Metropolis and all its givens (a steadily globalized economy, demographic changes, AIDS, unemployment, violence, and so on), which will make any return to the past both impossible and undesirable (87).

Lerup evokes the contradiction of contemporary urbanist practices, which include preservation and economic regeneration, that are influenced, on the one hand, by the speculations of global financial, real estate, and property development industries, and on the other, by the variously pitched claims for senses of community and place. For example, the claims by preservationists to maintain Georgian terraces or Victorian shop fronts in inner-city London are forced to concede that the original uses and contexts for these buildings have disappeared. Instead, their rhetoric must invoke recycling scarce resources (environmentalism), applying standardized criteria for determining a building of ‘special historic or architectural interest’ and an emotional discourse about the metropolis’s former grandeur. Moreover, as I discuss in Chapter Two, the rhetorical devices and urbanist strategies of preservation are contemporaneous with the rise of postmodernity and its characteristic proliferation of consumption networks. Hence, preservationist practices and the spaces they retrieve, insofar as they involve the deployment of architectural styles and objects created by previous urbanisms in order to articulate an urbanism in the present, are themselves postmodern.
Consequently, I propose that London, as the former hub of the colonial industrial capitalist system and a command center for the late, global capitalism, offers the richest terrain to examine the material effects of globalization and to construct a genealogy of a necessarily *hybrid* urbanism. Places, Doreen Massey suggests, are “constantly shifting articulations through time” (1995: 188). Looking variously at London’s notorious Docklands redevelopment during the 1980s, where office towers failed to generate a new financial and commercial district but did manage to displace working-class whites and scapegoat Bangladeshis, and the Turkish shops on Hackney High Street in east London, Massey elaborates the hybridity of places.

In effect, it is precisely the imprint on the urban landscape of the realities of Asian and African immigration to London, as well as other Western cities, which provides the context for theories of hybridity. ‘third’ spaces, diasporas and postcoloniality. The enunciations of third space traverse the boundaries of public (politics) and private (interests), the Enlightenment discourses of humanism, democracy, individual rights and freedoms and citizenship (see Bhabha 1994). They locate themselves in discursive spaces where meanings are contingent, ambivalent, anxious, tangential, assembling poststructuralist critiques of language, subjectivity and representation with the realities of migration. ‘Hybrid’ names the representational strategies of identity politics, of the blurring of national, highbrow, popular and ‘ethnic’ culture. However, what we can also ask is how these enunciations are situated in the physicality of the city, remade, on the one hand, by the localizations of global capital, and by migrant entrepreneurship (or the enterprise
of migrancy). Hybridity is thus not only at the level of the discursive, but makes its present felt in the multicultural metropolis.

How, then, do we do begin an ethnography of the disjunctive and ambivalent hybridity of contemporary London space? How do we conceptually link urban perception as a mode of ethnographic observation to the range of urban actors who actively produce and manage cityscapes; i.e., architects, planners, designers, preservationists, community activists, and urban regeneration officials? This stepping into hybridity, the strand that over time develops into the web of urban fieldwork, is not unlike the tourist. The tourist personifies the omnipresence of consumer culture, thus presenting to us a way of being in the city that greatly impacts theories of global and/or creative cities and the processes of architectural preservation, urban design and the strategies of economic regeneration that are subtended. Ethnographers of the city have to wonder, as I suggest in the following vignette, am I a tourist?

**AM I A TOURIST?**

You stand in a crowded car of the Misery Line as the train shuttles from King’s Cross to the Angel.² You had waited ten minutes for the train at Waterloo, but it is easier than finding the best bus route across the Thames. Instead you jostle against the pink-bloused and gray-skirted, the blue-shirted, indigo-tied and black-panted, with their noses in the *Evening*
Standard. What do you have to do? Run some errands, get some groceries, and look for a present for Cynthia.

The train stops at an already crowded platform. You say pardon mes to no one in particular and you edge your way to the doors, mind the gap and then look for the exit. The train is old but the station at the Angel has been recently refurbished with space to spare. You hear the train pull out as you head up the first of two sets of escalators, and walk up the left. The second is a long climb but you do it anyway, looking at the advertisements for perfume at the newest noodle restaurant on Upper Street. At the top you approach the gate, slide your Travelcard through, walk through the open doors, get your card and step outside the station.

The first thing you see is the flower stall, with the florist chatting with the espresso cart guy. You cross the street, enjoying the clip of heels on the pavement, and stop at the traffic island. You follow their lead, snake your way through the snarl of cars and double-deckers, and reach the pavement at the designer sausage place. You turn the corner, scan the magazines at the stand and pass a sock and underwear seller. Chapel Market, where you buy some of your fruits and vegetables, is closing down for the evening. Pensioners and mothers with prams trudge with groceries from Sainsbury’s avoiding the strewn banana boxes. They make their way to the bus stop for the housing estates in east Islington or Hackney.
You decide against browsing at Marks and Sparks and cross over to check out the cheese shop instead. You see if the baguettes are soft, the olives Sicilian. You glance at the range of cheeses and she asks you if you’d like a sample. You say that you’ll try the Tallegio. You recall that late afternoon outside an Italian grocery between here and the City when you shared a Tallegio and red pepper sandwich with someone you should forget. But you nibble anyway, and nod, smile, but say that you will take a half-pound of the Welsh goats.

At the Angel, where Upper Street and Essex Road meet, the pavement is elevated and especially broad. You walk by more sock and underwear hawkers, the kid you saw during your first week here asking for spare change. People are waiting for the buses, including yours, and then you remember the present for Cynthia. You ponder getting her some pigment at the art supply store further along Upper Street, where the restaurants are more expensive and their decor sharper. Toward the top of the street are Islington Town Hall and a collection of municipal offices that confirm, if you didn’t know, that this is the heart of Islington, N1.

You step into the budget bookstore and look for Cynthia’s present. You are not sure whether she reads anymore, but a coffee table book may insult her. This brings a vague smile to your lips. But what if she stops the
evening and gathers everyone around and then opens her presents? So you
pick up a book that is a cross between scholarship and coffee table
adornment, perhaps, you think, the fate of all architecture books. You
find one about North London, scavenge through the index, find Islington
and you turn to one of the page references only to read that:

[Islington] did not really become a suburb until the late eighteenth
century, when development, previously confined to Upper Street
and the southern end of Essex Road (then Lower Street), began to
reach into the surrounding fields. ... The area around the Green and
west into Barnsbury boasts more terraces and semis of the 1820s,
1830s and 1840s than almost any other place in the country, and
much of this new housing was meant for City clerks and successful
artisans, who relied on the omnibus to ferry them to points south
and west. 1

You look over the cashier’s head and out the window. Islington’s not for
commuters anymore, you think. Its preserved terraces, the Green now
stylized as an urban park, the area’s ability to have biweekly antique
markets on one side of the Angel and to manage the messiness of Chapel
Market on the other draws people like you. You exhale, and admit, that,
guidebook or not, you are an urban tourist. You check the price of the
book and then walk toward the cash register. Cynthia will love it.

In studies of gentrification, Islington has been compared to Park Slope in
Brooklyn and the Marais quarter in Paris (e.g., Carpenter and Lees 1995). Yet for
the descriptions that make urban transformation an object to be packaged and
consumed, we only have to consult a current travel guide. On the back of one of the
leading ones, Fodor’s 1998 edition of “Exploring London,” we find a snapshot of the
catered market, who are “independent travelers who want to discover London on their own.” [The guidebook is] an ideal blend of practical information, vivid photos, and honest, insightful writing, with detailed maps and plans.” Two-thirds into the guidebook, amidst the ‘Clerkenwell, Islington and the East End’ section, we find a Focus on Islington section, with the following caption to stage our tour: “Islington has become a chic address for young Londoners. For those who can afford them, its terraces of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century houses offer elegant living in spacious well-proportioned rooms relatively close to the City and central London. As a result, Islington has a lively atmosphere, with its street markets, theaters, restaurants and pubs” (182).

What relates elegant living to a lively atmosphere? We’ll have to wait to answer this question, because following this focus, and in between the tale of the ill-fated Docklands redevelopment, is Focus on Spitalfields.

A visit to Spitalfields lets you sample the surprising contrasts of London’s East End. This working-class neighborhood has long been a home to the poorest of refugees. Its character was first formed by Huguenot weavers; their houses, many of them still standing, had slight attics where hand-loom weavers worked all the hours of daylight to produce fine silk clothing. After the Huguenots came Jewish refugees from Russia and Poland, specializing in furs and leather, followed more recently by Bengali immigrants, who now toil in the same eighteenth century buildings over sewing machines and steam irons, producing garments for sale in London’s clothes shops and street markets (186).

The caption, placed within a snapshot of the Brick Lane landscape, where “simple restaurants...serve some of the cheapest and most authentic curries to be found in London,” incorporates Bangladeshi garment workers and restaurateurs in a chain of local immigration now packaged for the more adventurous urban tourist. The consumer, along with the contemporary cultural producer, Lash and Urry argue,
turns referents into signs, aestheticizing or *branding* non-aesthetic objects (1994: 15; my italics). The social, architectural and cultural forces that have shaped Islington and Spitalfields, past and present, in this sense, become signs, differently branded and then packaged to attract the urban tourist. This process is also a strategic component in the marketing of place (Fetter 1993; Sadler 1993) that features in many contemporary inner-city economic regeneration programs. In fact, as I discuss in Chapter Six, Spitalfields is no exception, as the revitalization program, “Releasing the Visitor Economy,” suggests.

In addition, the description’s packaging of Spitalfields involves the incorporation of Bangladeshi migrants as a legitimate (even desired) element in the construction of a distinctive place. Jane M. Jacobs argues that such an inclusion fits into a larger, national discourse of English tolerance for immigrants (1996: 85-86). Her work locates the operation of this discourse among the other desired lure of Spitalfields, its preserved eighteenth centuriness.

As it happens, the *Focus on Spitalfields* includes a note on conservation under a paragraph entitled ‘The New Georgians’ on page 187. Despite the mistake on the *decade* when activist conservation erupted in Spitalfields, their use of the ‘New Georgians’ is a direct borrowing from *The New Georgian Handbook* (Artley and Robinson 1985). Artley and Robinson satirize how a concern for the conservation of built space becomes a more public staging of a historicist stylization of private life in the reclaimed inner city homestead. This concern, as I sketch in the next chapter, was shared by a rather narrow fraction of an established (upper) middle class. That thirteen years later Fodor’s finds it advantageous to incorporate the
conservationist along with the Bangladeshi migrant suggests that they both fashion identities or practices that can be sampled by a much broader groups of people. By contrast, King’s Cross, where the protracted struggle over defining the future of the area, and notwithstanding its seedy glamour and the monumental aura of its railway landscape that makes it popular with filmmakers, is yet to be packaged by Fodor’s.

BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND REFLEXIVITY: GROUNDS FOR ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE GLOBAL CITY

We can describe the ground of ethnographic practice in the global city – if only a shifting foundation that moves beneath our feet -- as caught between community and reflexivity.

Undoubtedly, ‘community’ is a much bandied, overextended term these days. It circulates madly among the initiatives that I describe in this dissertation at King’s Cross or Spitalfields. It can refer to a variety of allegiances: from those who live and work in a particular, geographically-definable area, to ethnic, racial, social and cultural groups which share certain alleged characteristics and experiences. It can also refer to the matrix of these relationships that give an area a sense of place. In terms like “community development,” “community-led regeneration” and “community capitalism” it evokes a level of scale: the everyday or the local as opposed to the citywide, the regional, the national, or the international. With others, such as the “international community” or the “community of scholars” it suggests allegiance or similarity of interests that transcend geographic boundaries.
Within the context of the changing landscape of the inner city, community can encompass the lifestyles of its assorted neighborhoods to signify a sense of an intimate, everyday life that is sustained through active collaboration among a range of linked networks. It is in this sense that community is the opposite of a tourist experience of the city. Consequently, community forms the backdrop to the often murky discussions of generating community in King's Cross and Spitalfields, and for which the most committed strive. In this endeavor, community, as Derrida describes the experience of justice, is an aporia, an irreducible and irresolvable dilemma.⁴

Yet, despite these problems of specification and reference, community describes two important factors in Repackaging the Inner City. First, as a term that orients a practice, it is shared by the four major groups of urbanist agents that I interacted with: conservationists, community planning activists, directors of community trusts, and cultural producers. All these agents understood community as intimacy and affinity, on the one hand, within a network of people who had a commitment to similar interests, and on the other, with this network and their relationships to the specific spaces in which they work, were concerned about and for which they deeply cared. These spaces are the inner city areas under revitalization, formerly industrial districts that are being transformed into and marketed as new cultural districts.

King's Cross and Spitalfields, the focus of Repackaging the Inner City, are pre-twentieth century urban districts. King's Cross takes shape with the coming of the railway and subsequent industrialization in the mid nineteenth century.
Spitalfields's urbanism is even older, with its Market site dating from Elizabethan times and its dwellings and workspaces originally housing eighteenth century silk weavers. Yet this periodization is deceptive, for alteration, demolition and new construction have continued and are continuing. Hence, despite that much of the character of these districts were formed in earlier periods, the questions of community development, conservation and revitalization which have circulated in Spitalfields for more than twenty years and in King's Cross for a dozen, are those attuned to late twentieth century concerns.

Moreover, it is King's Cross's and Spitalfields's heterogeneity of time and space, their heterodox urbanism, and the variety of everyday lives they anchor – immigrant families, students, young professionals, retirees, un(der)employed working-class singles – that draws interest, including mine, to the inner city. Yet this interest is not merely decorative, for more than most other kinds of spaces, it is in the inner city where we encounter the most pronounced effects of globalization, deindustrialization, the expansion of service-sector enterprises and 'third world' immigration, and King's Cross and Spitalfields are no exceptions.

In my effort to narrate agency in inner-city London, I have privileged representing the practices of historic conservation, community development, urban revitalization, and cultural industry rather than documenting the everyday life of Londoners in King's Cross or Spitalfields. These practices mediate the range of social, cultural, political and economic questions that lurk in Repackaging the Inner City. They also transform my own position as an ethnographer vis-à-vis informants, such that the spaces of ethnographic engagement are among and between
conservationists, community planning activists, cultural producers and managers of regeneration projects and community trusts. This refracted ethnographic practice makes the question of ethnographic reflexivity increasingly roving and situational. It also suggests a diffuse ethnographic persona that bears resemblances to two figures of the industrial and the post-industrial city that we must consider: the urban tourist and the flâneur.

Urban tourism is a symptom of a larger phenomenon, one of both capitalist consumption and production. The tourist, I would argue, is the overdetermined subject of late, global capitalism, the figure who best expresses its consumption logic, its expansion through the service industries, and the condition we’ve become accustomed to think as already past – that of the postmodern. The tourist forces us to question our own practices of investigation and travel, indeed our contemporary understanding of the ever-shrinking world. Pleasure, stresses Appadurai (1996: 83), is the crux of the consumption logic of capitalism. Certainly, the tourist is the pleasure-seeker, and within capitalism’s necessary desire to create more and more desire, the tourist who wants something instead of, or in addition to, sun and sand can turn to ‘eco-tourism’ in Costa Rica and to ‘urban tourism’, on which European economies increasingly rely (Ashworth and Larkham, eds. 1994; Kearns and Philo, eds. 1993). As I elaborate below, the urban tourist finds a certain ancestor in the nineteenth century metropolitan flâneur. The class, gender, race, sexual and national positioning of the tourist are thankfully broader than those of the flâneur. However, the lesson remains the same, for, as with the flâneur, in the tourist “we recognize our own consumerist mode of being-in-the-world” (Buck-Morss 1986: 104-105).
Pierre Bourdieu’s intricate ethnographic study of Parisian consumption patterns and the creation and expression of *arts de vivre* attends to their differentiation — or as he devoutly details, distinction — across the class-marked terrain of consumption (1984). And, if we recall Fodor’s foci, everyone may have his or her London, but not everyone’s London is going to include Islington, let alone Spitalfields. This doesn’t mean that tourism in Spitalfields is nonexistent. I for one, in the fall of 1998, had the distinct pleasure of being stopped by a young, white female who asked me to direct her to the sights and smells of Brick Lane, the heart of Spitalfields’s ‘Banglatown’; this, despite her ostensible guidebook, and the fact that I had been taking pictures of warehouses on Fashion Street at the corner where I was stopped. In effect, she and I represent the welcome tourists targeted by the “Releasing the Visitor Economy” program, one of the three major ongoing projects of Cityside Regeneration, the multi-sector partnership charged with co-coordinating economic and cultural growth in Spitalfields and neighboring areas (see Chapter Six).

The question then becomes how to theorize such tourism. We have Fodor’s promotional material on its back cover of *Exploring London*. A more fruitful route would be to follow Lash and Urry’s (1994) argument for a notion of ‘aesthetic reflexivity.’ For Lash and Urry, aesthetic reflexivity describes the process of subject formation in late, unruly capitalism. They emphasize a departure from the sociologies of modernity of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. Instead, they suggest that the critical metropolitan modernity of Baudelaire, Simmel and Benjamin at the turn of the century is a precursor to an aesthetically-based reflexivity among
late capitalist subjects who use “film, quality television, poetry, travel and painting as mediators in the reflexive regulation of everyday life” (54).

This reflexivity, although in the seeds of high modernist art and literature is much more generalized as a late twentieth century phenomenon, in John Featherstone’s telling phrase, “the aestheticization of everyday life” (1991). Aesthetic reflexivity thus turns on a certain kind of packaged consumption and its import for the fashioning of everyday life. Within this frame, which, they argue, involves “the spread of a kind of aesthetic cultural capital to wider groups of people,” are reclaimed urban spaces such as Islington and Spitalfields. The arenas of consumption in such places, which may include such seemingly unrelated products as antiques, arts and crafts, groceries or leather goods from a street market, dinner at a curry house, within the intimate scale of a refurbished eighteenth or nineteenth century cityscape, become part and parcel of an aestheticist but reflexive construction of one’s everyday urban life.

Jameson, thinking of Los Angeles, argues that postmodern space represents a mutation in the built environment that we ourselves, as human subjects, cannot yet approach. As he continues, “there has been a mutation in the object, unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject; we do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism.” (1999: 10).

These spaces are perhaps best captured by Walter Benjamin’s flanerie among Berlin’s streets, and in the collection of fragmented observations of bourgeois
industrial culture's production and consumption of the urban stage, the *Passagen-Werke* (1985, 1986; Buck-Morss 1989). Although the older upscale boutiques and department stores remain in many cities, it is the messier, less picturesque formerly industrial spaces of the inner city in which we have our most extensive residues of nineteenth-century urbanism. However, these spaces also are encroached by a burgeoning financial sector that imprints its dominance through an architecture of hyperspace; in effect, producing a *speculative urbanism*. These often include the hotels, financial headquarters, conference and exhibition centers that refigure downtown and inner city fringe areas of Western metropolises. At the same time, the remnants of an earlier manufacturing age have been targeted by a range of public and private interests as ripe for regeneration. Part of the various urban regeneration schemes on both sides of the Atlantic is historic conservation or preservation.

For many urban analysts, conservation is an alibi of gentrification, whereby existing working-class residents are displaced by incoming, middle-class homesteaders that reclaim and regenerate an inner-city district (see Smith 1996). For them, conservation represents the aestheticization of everyday life in the inner city, where those with the requisite cultural capital physically and socially transform (destroy) an area. As I show in Chapters Two and Five, conservation is a class and race marked aesthetic practice that has been intimately involved in the remaking and remarketing of inner city areas such as Spitalfields.

Yet, I would emphasize that the picture is more complex. Conservation in Britain expands during the 1970s reaching a height in the economic recession of the early 1980s. Historically, it had developed from the late nineteenth century, but only
was legally coded and institutionalized during the first decade of British Welfare State (i.e., from the mid 1940s). However, amidst a declining public sector and increasing decay of de-industrialized urban space, conservation develops as a historic and aesthetic engagement with the spatial effects of late capitalism. This engagement is typically described as “anti-modernist” (Powers 1998). However, it is important to note that, as a practice that emerges and becomes refined during the 1970s and 80s, it involves the critical rejection of the growth of a consumer culture that typifies postmodernism. Conservation in this sense, rather than just gentrification, reflects the fraught endeavor to rehabilitate everyday life (see Lefebvre 1991: 59-99).

We could attempt to understand historic conservation in Britain as one of the new social movements (NSMs). According to some of the analysts of the NSMs, conservation’s formation and/or identification with the upper middle class disqualifies it right away. For Claus Offe (1985), the NSMs consist of the ‘new’ middle class, “elements” of the “old” middle class, students, homemakers, and retirees as well as others outside the labor market (831-2). The “new” middle class works in the public sector and in social services; the old middle class include the independent and self-employed, such as shopkeepers and artisan-producers.

Offe identifies four major NSMs: feminism and human rights, peace, environmental protection, and alternative or “dual economy.” He notes that environmental protection involves both the natural and the built or urban environment (828). Later in his analysis, Offe charts three possible political alliances between the “conservative-liberal Right,” the “social-democratic Left,” and
the NSMs (figure 4, 860). For the first alliance, between the conservative-liberal Right and the NSMs, he locates ‘conservationism’ as a part of environmental policy. The terms of the dual economy are ‘support for community and self-help forms of social services’ and ‘tax subsidies for small businesses.’

Conservation involves the research, appreciation, and connoisseurship of old buildings and the commitment to see these buildings preserved, intact if at all possible. It has become part and parcel of municipal town planning or “development control” departments all over Britain, although its local significance and the extent to which it is respected by municipal planners varies with how much of the municipality is covered by listed buildings and conservation areas. For some, conservation signifies an extension of the cultivation of a stylized way of life into an architecturally varied, but decaying built environment. In the early 1980s, such cultivation, though duly satirized by Artley and Robinson, projected the concern for old buildings onto an increasingly fraught public space. This was particularly marked in the formerly industrial areas of the inner city, which greatly suffered from Thatcher’s economic restructuring.

Furthermore, the alliance that Ofie describes between the conservative-liberal Right and the NSMs corresponds in Britain, interestingly enough, to Thatcher’s “enterprise culture.” This discourse, so characteristic of the 1980s, sought to revitalize an ailing national economy in which the inner city became a specific target (see Deakin and Edwards 1993). During this time, public sector social services were increasingly offloaded or privatized to various non-profit entities, such as charities, community and voluntary sector groups. Under current Prime Minister
Tony Blair’s New Labour government, this linked discourse of entrepreneurialism and non-profit sector services hasn’t disappeared but matured, as the community regeneration efforts at King’s Cross and Spitalfields reveal.

In Spitalfields, at the eastern edge of an expanding financial district, and arguably one of the most contested localities in the country, conservation has become entangled in the local politics of economic development. Over the course of two decades, the key conservation organization in the area, the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust has followed a property-led conservation strategy that has normalized a part of Spitalfields’s built up environment as “Georgian” (on strategy, see de Certeau 1984). This kind of approach to regeneration was very similar to the work of Spitalfields Small Business Association, which, among other things, has refurbished and manages some eighty units of housing and workspaces for its members, mainly Bangladeshi garment workers and entrepreneurs. Both groups have established working relationships among public officials, private-sector developers and financiers, and local voluntary groups in Cityside Regeneration, a private-public partnership charged with continuing the gains made in revitalizing Spitalfields and nearby areas.

As such, it is more accurate to think of conservation, and for that matter, community development, as practices that deploy existing social networks in which they operate to engender new ones. Conservationists have long operated as an informal network of friends and colleagues that has been built over the last two decades. It is not merely a class-based network. Rather, it is one that has developed through working relationships on saving historic buildings from demolition or
alteration, on researching and writing about buildings in a variety of publications, on collaborating on providing testimony at public planning inquiries, on working closely at the former Historic Buildings Division, and on serving on volunteer-based casework committees of the Victorian or Twentieth Century Societies. It is these sorts of activities in which community among conservationists has been created.

The aporia of the quest for community against the increasing spectacularization of the cityscape is the mise-en-scène for the flâneur. The flâneur has received a great deal of attention among cultural critics over the 1980s and 90s, some seeking it to analyze it within the writings of Benjamin, others its masculinism and complicity with the Gaze (e.g., Wolff 1985). I retrieve the flâneur here not to rehearse these debates, but to ask whether this urban subject offers insight into narrating the terrain of the late twentieth-century urban ethnographer.

The flâneur is the privileged, bourgeois male who loiters in the city’s streets as he gazes in store windows along the boulevards and observes its crowds. He wants to be among the crowds and see the latest goods in the shops, but he wants to maintain his distance, his cultivated bourgeois subjectivity. As Susan Buck-Morss writes:

The arcades, interior streets lined with luxury shops and open through iron and glass roofs to the stars, were a wish-image, expressing the bourgeois individual’s desire to escape through the symbolic medium of objects from the isolation of his/her subjectivity. On the boulevards, the flaneur, now jostled by crowds and in full view of the urban poverty which inhabited public streets, could maintain a rhapsodic view of modern existence only with the aid of illusion, which is just what the literature of flanerie – physiognomies, novels of the crowd – was produced to provide. If at the beginning, the flâneur as private subject dreamed himself out into the world, at the end, flanerie was an ideological attempt to reprivatize social
space, and to give assurance that the individual's passive observation was adequate for knowledge of social reality (1986: 103 italics added).

The flâneur’s split desire for release from the alienation of privatized bourgeois existence is also met with a concern for social distinction amidst the urban throng. As Buck-Morss notes, the flâneur is a “a type who writes fiction” (111), a writer who drew his material from the city for the feuilletons and serialized novels in the nineteenth century mass-produced newspaper. As a writer, his observation needs the drama and ephemera of urban everyday life. Yet, in order to write, he requires a measure of distance. This split, however also reflects the “financial security and emotional ambiguity of the role” which, Elizabeth Wilson continues, is underplayed by (feminist) critiques of the flâneur as beholder of the Gaze (1995: 72).

The figure of the flâneur is fundamentally one of ambivalence. S/he represents the desire to observe, analyze and communicate urban experience under capitalism. The flâneur’s enjoyment of urban space is inseparable from his or her critical viewing practices, such that in order to experience and describe the cityscape sensuously, the latter must be an aestheticized, even packaged object. If flânerie was sufficient to describe the experience of nineteenth century urban consumption, the increasing expansion of media, telecommunications and information technologies throughout the twentieth century disperses aesthetic reflexivity. Yet, Chris Jenks (1995) argues, in the flâneur is the modality to critically apprehend late or post-modern capitalism:

The flâneur, though grounded in everyday life, is an analytic form, a narrative device, an attitude towards knowledge and its social context.... The flâneur is a multilayered palimpsest that enables us to ‘move’ from real products of modernity, like commodification and leisured patriarchy,
through the practical organisation of space and its negotiation by inhabitants of a city, to a critical appreciation of the state of modernity and its erosion into the post-, and onwards to a reflexive understanding...of those previous formations (148-149; Jenks's italics).

The figure of the flâneur is a mode of producing past urban knowledge that still affects the present. It reflects a critical ambivalence to capitalism's commodification of the cityscape and the reflexive consumption of its objects. The flâneur's aesthetic reflexivity in the city has an affinity, I would argue, with the reflexivity of the urban ethnographer, who must weave the mise-en-scène of his or her fieldwork. Yet, this necessary reflexivity can also be found among the range of urban actors of the inner city London stage that I describe in the subsequent chapters -- historic conservationists, community planners, directors of economic development initiatives, producers in the cultural industries. Whether they seek to rearticulate the old cityscape vanishing beneath postmodern hyperspace or secure affordable workshop spaces for a small, industrial sector under assault by the encroachment of the financial district, or in my own case, critically assemble an examination of these formations within the ethnographic mode, they share a desire to assemble a narrative of the cityscape. Their endeavors are urbanist, producing hybrid spaces for living, working and sociability that are sympathetic to local needs and the inner city's intimate scale. Against the seemingly passive observations of the flâneur, however, these urban actors and I would want to claim a more active involvement.

For the ethnographer, Marcus writes, such "involvements are now multiple, conflicting, and more ambiguous...[and lead] to circumstantial activism" (1999: 17). As activism it is:
quite specific and circumstantial to the conditions of doing multisited research itself. It arises from the various interventions that one makes in each of the fieldwork sites and the resulting issue of resolving the sometimes contradictory relationships among those interventions. After all, the anthropologist is not the presumed outsider that she or he was in traditional research. In order to work at all, she or he must make certain kinds of alliances or separations to define the very position of ethnographer. In certain sites, one seems to be working with, and in others, working against, changing sets of subjects (17).

Continuing in this vein, I would iterate that within this study of the repackaging of inner city London, the separation between myself and the range of actors I interviewed is not so much racial, cultural or geographic difference, which, of course, persists. Rather, the difference has to do with my array of activities in London having been tied to producing a dissertation. My reflexivity as a fieldworker and writer responds to the transformations of late capitalist inner city space. These responses, within the circuits of the production and consumption of urban space, jostle and intersect with those of the people I interviewed. They, too, speak of interventions made both within and against these circuits. Their urbanist practices, whether advocating the reuses of derelict or redundant buildings, creating workspaces to be locally managed by non-profit groups, or innovating in the cultural industries, produce new objects in the regulation of everyday life that Lash and Urry describe as central to aesthetic reflexivity.

Nonetheless, neither their sophistication nor their non-profit motivations can completely ignore the rampant speculation culture of property development in London. In fact, their interventions can become advertisements for an upwardly mobile inner city, which lures more predatory developers and real estate agents. Hence, whether their claims are for Georgian Spitalfields, a People’s Plan for King’s
Cross, or new cultural quarters in both these districts, they participate in a reflexive economy that cannot escape the aesthetic packaging of the inner city.


2 Misery Line is colloquial for the Northern Line, which runs from suburban North London through two branches in central London and down into suburban southwest London. Its component lines, the early City and South London lines, for example, were the first electrified tubes when they were built in 1900. Among other things, the Misery Line is known for its deep stations, the worst service record of all the Underground lines and the oldest and slowest trains.

3 In Chris Miele, “From Aristocratic Ideal to Middle-Class Idyll, 1690-1840,” in English Heritage 1999, pp. 44, 45.

4 Derrida (1990: 947) writes: “It is impossible to have a full experience of aporia, that is, of something that does not allow passage...from this point of view, justice [or community] would be the experience that we are not able to experience...I think that there is no justice [community] without this experience, how important it may be, of aporia.”
CHAPTER TWO

AESTHETIC POLITICS IN URBAN SPACE: HISTORIC CONSERVATION IN LONDON

The Anglomania of the upper classes in continental Europe arises from the ritualization on the island of feudal practices intended to be sufficient onto themselves. Culture is not maintained there as a separate sphere of the objective mind, as dabbling in art and philosophy, but as a form of empirical existence. The high life aspires to be the beautiful life. It affords those engaging in it ideological pleasure-gains. Because the formalization of life becomes a task requiring the adherence of rules, the artificial preservation of a style, the maintenance of a delicate balance between correctness and independence, existence itself appears endowed with meaning, so appearing the bad conscience of the socially superfluous. The constant injunction to do and say what exactly befits one's status and situation demands a kind of moral effort. By making it difficult to be the person one is, one gains the feeling of living up to a patriarchal noblesse oblige. At the same time the displacement of culture from its objective manifestations to immediate life dispels the risk of one's immediacy being shaken by intellect. The latter is spurned as a disruption of aplomb, a want of taste, but this is done, not with the embarrassing coarseness of an East Prussian Junker, but by a seemingly intellectual criterion that of aestheticizing everyday life. The flattering illusion is produced that one has been spared any cleavage into superstructure and infrastructure, culture and corporeal reality. But for all its aristocratic trappings, ritual falls into the late-bourgeois habit of hypostasizing a performance in itself meaningless as meaning, of degrading mind to the duplication of what is there in any case.

The norm followed is fictitious; its social preconditions, like its model, court ceremony, have ceased to exist, and it is acknowledged not because it is felt as binding, but in order to legitimize an order advantageously illegitimate. So Proust, with the infallibility of one himself susceptible, observed that Anglomania and the cult of formally stylized living are found less among aristocrats that among those aspiring to rise: from the snob to the parvenu it is only a step.


I keep Adorno's words as a caution to the dangers of aestheticism in articulating the place of historic conservation in late modern capitalism, the subject of this chapter.

During seventeen months of fieldwork in London, I interviewed nearly a dozen people involved with regeneration programs, community planning activism, and a range of innovative enterprises in the nascent cultural sectors at King's Cross and Spitalfields. I volunteered at least two days a week as an administrator and exhibition curator at the King's Cross Railway Lands Group for fourteen months. However, by the largest group I interviewed - more than two dozen - were involved in historic conservation in London.
To me, the conservationist symbolized the emergence of a specific kind of urbanist agent, wary of the increasing commodification of everyday life and interested in entangling aesthetic with politics. The conservationist, I thought, didn’t want to be alienated from his or her environment. In addition, s/he was concerned about the signification of time; more specifically, time as spatialized in the built environment. S/he wanted the residues of an earlier age to be demolished or unsympathetically redeveloped because the building no longer made sense to postmodern urban planners and architects or profit-driven developers.

I myself have no background in conservation. I stumbled upon it by meeting Marta Galicki, an American who had worked as a specialist in historic buildings in London in the 1980s. She put me in touch with her former colleagues who became the first strands in a web of informants. From this first conservation, I began to think of conversation as offering a point of departure for an ethnographic investigation of how local actors get involved and participate in managing and transforming urban space. I was curious of how I could locate conservationist agency socially and culturally, and immediately thought of the combination of aesthetics and politics of the Bloomsbury Group. For, despite Bloomsbury’s seemingly little concern for the urban terrain, they shared a structural similarity in their location in British society and the style of their rhetoric.

The conservationists are representatives of a class fraction that conjures Oxbridge and is overdetermined by its racial and class homogeneity, although that is showing signs of wear. The conservationists, nearly all with backgrounds in architecture, architectural history, or ‘straight history’, are rich in the cultural capital that
Pierre Bourdieu (1984) so painstakingly describes as characteristically possessed by artists and intellectuals. They tend not to have much more economic capital than we associate with the middle class. Of course, the national conservation societies such as the Georgian Group and the Victorian Society may have titled (aristocratic) patrons and chairs. Moreover, HRH Prince Charles, known for his anti-modernist, ‘vernacular’ architectural preferences, heads the Regeneration through Heritage program and the Prince of Wales Institute for Architecture. By contrast, the pressure group, SAVE Britain’s Heritage, was formed in the mid 1970s by two prominent journalists with extensive media connections, in response to the then emblematic destruction of the country house.

In this way, it seemed to me, the aesthetic and political practices of London’s conservationists were similar to those of the Bloomsbury Group, which, according to Raymond Williams, championed a notion of the “civilized individual” that, “[f]or all it continuing general orthodoxy appears now much more often as a beleagu[ed]red rather than as an expanding position” (1980: 165). It is precisely this beleagueredness, coupled with a specific modality of urbanist agency, which made me want to pursue interviews with conservationists in London.

On the one hand, I wanted to write against the conventional dismissal of conservationists as merely middle-class gentrifiers in revitalizing the residential and economic base of the inner city (e.g., Smith 1996). Additionally, I wanted to complicate our understanding of British cultural identities that are shaped by active involvement with changing urban form. One of the most salient indices of a changing Britain from the 1970s through the 1990s has been the coming of age of a generation of 'new
Westerners': Asian and Black Britons. Their literary, cinematic, and cultural critical works have been pivotal in shaping anti-racist, cultural, and postcolonial studies (e.g., Bhabha 1994; Gilroy 1987, 1993; Kureishi 1990, 1995; Rushdie 1988; Spivak 1993: chapters 11, 12). As enunciations of marginality and migrancy, they have forced the critique of whiteness, itself burgeoning into "white studies" (Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993; Ware 1992). The priority in these efforts is to articulate the shifting ground of politicized identity. London in these examples is understood as pre-eminent multicultural urban spaces, rather than articulations of changing relationships between globalization, capitalism and urban change. Conversely, the cultural specificities of a globalizing London are often absent in the economic and sociological accounts that seek to explain it (e.g., Hutton 1995).

Despite the fact that historic conservationist and diasporic agencies haven't been linked together in an analysis of changing metropolitan space, I would argue that they share salient congruences. Briefly, both are cultural effects in the production of urban spaces in late modernity, itself tied to shifts in Western economies from the late 1960s (Harvey 1985, 1989; Jameson 1991). Within this production, both conservationist and diasporic practices emerge as spatial politics, cathecting - to use a psychoanalytic term meaning to 'occupy with desire' - urban, often, older, inner-city spaces which migrants and preservationists find themselves sharing. Moreover, as practices that create specific kinds of everyday lives that are uneasy with the commodification of culture, they put into play Michel de Certeau's (1984) notions of strategies and tactics.

Tactics, de Certeau explains, cannot inhabit a "proper" or their own space, institutionally or spatially. They are unlike strategies, force-relationships that "assume a
place" and "can be circumscribed," thus allowing the strategic subject - "a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution" - to separate itself from the environment (1984: xix). Strategies are thus calculi that rely on the coloniziation of space. Within these spaces, de Certeau argues, a tactic can operate, "insinuat[ing] itself...fragmentarily without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance...The proper is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time" (xix).

Conservation often begins as a tactic, such as by salvaging the ruins of an earlier building style, or advocating the architectural worthiness of a rundown area. However, when conservation comes to assume a place, as in a municipal conservation area, of which they are over 800 in England, or when it is institutionalized in planning departments or nationally at English Heritage, then conservation has become strategic. Although both conservationist and diasporic practices have become more strategic in the 1990s, it is not simply the march of time -- from the 1970s to the 1990s, a critical gestation and maturation period for both -- that transforms them from tactics to strategies. Rather, it depends on the mobilization and normalization of conservationist and diasporic practices in space.

By the late 1990s, these practices were imbricated in strategies of encouraging the growth of local cultural industries to regenerate inner-city areas and create new objects of trade (and prestige). Conservation, with its arguments for re-using and recycling older, often late Georgian and Victorian properties and diasporic culture, with its use of popular media, such as music, television, and film, become inserted into the play of these strategies. Both practices, however dissimilar they appear, are forced to
negotiate the inner-city terrain where this strategic use of culture seeks to normalize and transform it as a new 'cultural quarter' for London.

Importantly, this strategy entangles already existing cultural tactics of arts groups in the inner city with the imperatives of regeneration programs and a national policy under the current Blair government to support and expand cultural production in Britain. I take these issues up explicitly in Chapter Six. However, in order to better understand how conservation informs contemporary urbanism, we should understand it as a specific mode of agency that has shaped late twentieth-century (British) urban space.

To do this, we first need to: (1) get a sense of the relationship of aesthetics and everyday urban life that develops in industrial, modern capitalist society; (2) trace the elaboration of these relationship in Britain into notions of heritage, both personal and public; and (3) sketch the genealogy of the formation of the ethos of British conservation policy. With this contextual overview in mind, I then focus on the emergence and rise of practices of heritage, conservation and the aestheticization of everyday life from the mid 1970 into the late 1990s. I first describe the development of conservationist agency within the economic stagnation of the 1970s and located institutionally in the former Greater London Council’s Historic Buildings Division. Second, I show the ongoing institutionalization of conservation policy in the work histories of several female conservationists whose experiences illustrate the more pragmatic frameworks of conservation. Third, as way of conclusion, I return to the theme of diaspora, suggesting that conservationists begin to look at how newer Black and Asian Britons are injecting new uses to the old, and often historic, building and spaces in the inner city districts in which many of them live.
In order to discuss aesthetic relationships to urban objects within emergent commodity capitalism, I turn to Walter Benjamin. For Benjamin, one of the casualties of modernity is the decline of aura in the aesthetic object. To perceive aura in an object, Benjamin writes, "means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return" (1985: 188). In his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin links this erosion of communicability in the aesthetic objects of film, photographs, and art with their loss of unique production in the circuits of mass, industrial culture (see 221, 224, 226). In addition, the dossiers which make up his Passagen Werke are littered with thoughts on the emotional relationships between city dwellers and the buildings, streets, views, and spaces that surround them in turn of the century Paris, Berlin and Naples (Buck-Morss 1989).

Whether dwelling upon iron railings for row houses or railway stations, glass for shop windows and skyscrapers, or reading postcards and photographs, Benjamin endeavors to actively inhabit the nineteenth century European metropolis. Paying attention to the visuality of urban architectural and commercial forms, his speculations on the transformations of urban experience and memory are tied to his thoughts on aura. In that sense, Benjamin is presciently aware of what contemporary architectural theorists have been arguing, namely, that, architecture comes to function more and more as a consumable image in the mass-mediated culture of modernity (Colomina 1994). As such, it suggests how, like a photograph or painting, an architectural object can enter a relational structure of looking, and, potentially, desire.

The seductive potential of the auratic thing in the built, urban environment, I think, derives from its ability to join two fragments, if only fleetingly: one, the intensely
private enjoyment of the auratic object; and two, the conviction or feeling that this object is significant to the cityscape to which it belongs and gives distinct meaning. This split appeal of the architectural object, its hold on our private enjoyment of space and its animation of a sense of politics - that this enjoyment be collectively shared - is the problem of everyday life in a commodified social order. It is also, I would argue, the problematic of linking (private) aesthetics with (public) politics.

Mike Featherstone (1991) discusses this problematic, listing three senses of the aestheticization of everyday life. The first seeks "to efface the boundary between art and everyday life" and finds examples in early twentieth century Dada and Surrealism (66). The second, Featherstone continues, seeks to turn life into a work of art, a project that has long fascinated intellectuals and artists. He cites Dandyism as an example of this aestheticist ethics, itself an important reference "in the development of artistic countercultures, the bohème and avant-gardes in mid-to-late nineteenth century Paris," and in Britain, observable in the writings of Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, the philosophy of G E Moore and the Bloomsbury Group (67). The third sense refers to the flows of images and signs and their saturation and commodification of everyday life. For Featherstone, the relationship to the second and third suggests the interplay between the "development of mass consumer culture dream-worlds and a separate (counter) cultural sphere" of artists and intellectuals who have sought to "thematize and comprehend this process" (68). This relationship of life as a work of art and the effects of an image-saturated society on everyday life, besides the shaping of artistic and intellectual strategies, and specifically at the level of urban space, stages the predicament of historic conservation in Britain.
In attempting to sketch an anatomy of conservation in Britain, I try to ask why in the late 1970s and early to mid 1980s, conservation becomes, in the words of the late social(ist) historian Raphael Samuel, "one of the major aesthetic and social movements of our time" (1994: 25). I rely on the critical cultural histories of Samuel and Patrick Wright (1985, 1991) to provide an armature for my explorations, as well as gleanings from my interviews among London conservationists. By necessity, conservationists tend to fight for the preservation of specific buildings that are threatened by demolition or alteration; the surrounding, contextualizing environment is secondary. In contrast, my interest in conservation in London is precisely its role in reflecting a shift in the conceptualization and experience of the urban fabric over a period of time, roughly from the mid-1970s and continuing into the 1990s. As such, I would argue that urban conservation, developing at a time of intense economic and social transformation, during a time British baby-boomers were in their late 20s and 30s, changes its emblem of practice from the *country house* to the *inner city*. This transformation needs to be placed within the context of political and economic restructuring that results in a shrinking public sector, an expanding private sector driven by financial and other services, and a maturing non-profit community and voluntary sector.

Too often, conservation is inserted into economistic readings of these transformations, and understood merely as a practice that gentrifies a formerly working-class neighborhood. In London, and in Britain in general, however, the process has to be seen as involving two notions of culture: culture as 'heritage,' and culture as 'entrepreneurship and regeneration.' In this chapter, I deal with the first notion, analyzing the aesthetic politics of everyday life that develop in the heritage public
sphere. I take up the second in Chapter Six, where I suggest that inner-city conservation has become part of a multi-sector strategy to rethink inner city areas as new cultural quarters. Gathering seemingly disparate enterprises of architecture, design, fashion, music, advertising, publishing, and software design, the inner city as cultural quarter demonstrates the correlation between how people perceive the built environment and the current buoyancy of the British economy.

A good place to start is with Wright's *On Living in an Old Country* (1985). Wright's analytic lens is shaped by his return to England from British Columbia, Canada, at the beginning of the Thatcher years. His chapters are wanderings through the England where, as is much quipped, a museum was opening every fortnight, the England which, as arts policy critic Robert Hewison has argued, has been engulfed by the 'heritage industry' (1987). Rather than pouring further scorn, Wright seeks to understand the phenomenon within a trajectory of English cultural history. This takes in known literary figures, such as George Orwell, lesser-known ones such as Mary Butts, Shell Oil advertisements, 'national heritage' icons that became major media events such as the rising of the ship the Mary Rose, and the recent development of heritage policy under the Tories.

Wright meanders through these cases in order to elaborate a concept of everyday life developed from the historical analyses of Agnes Heller (1984) with Marx in the background. "Everyday life," writes Heller, "is objectification." However, "[l]ike every process of objectification, everyday life is objectification in two senses. On the one hand, it is the continuous process of the externalization of the subject. At the same time,
it is the process whereby the person is continually being re-created" (47). This double sense is also caught in Lefebvre’s notion of everyday life as that which pierces alienation, or externalization (1991: 97). Lefebvre’s project to "rehabilitate everyday life" is a double effort to bring an analysis of everyday life to bear upon French Marxist social philosophy, as it is to celebrate quotidian agency and its anchoring of diverse lived experiences.

I won’t explore here whether the effort to rehabilitate everyday life is similar to Habermas’ exhortations on the colonization of the lifeworld (1987). On first glance, Habermas doesn’t have the sense of heterogeneity and the significance of the city that characterize Lefebvre’s framing of everyday life as a category of social analysis. Nonetheless, Habermas does argue, in his account of the rise of the European bourgeois public sphere in the 18th century, that a key space for the formation of subjectivity and socialization into bourgeois norms is the family (1989: 44-55). For Habermas, this space is the ‘intimate sphere.’

A concept of intimacy is latent in that of everyday life. Certainly, in Wright’s use, everyday life is about having an intimate relationship at the level of landscape, urban and rural. That is, it is the relationship between the subject and the landscape and the ways in which these shape and anchor perceptions of memory and experience and in the 1970s and 80s, motifs of heritage, that Wright wants to unpack. His central idea in this respect, salient for any understanding of conservation’s aesthetic politics, is ‘Deep England.’ He explains:

Aside from the democratic cause of the Second World War, there is also a practical core to the patriotic fantasy - one which is real enough even though it lies at the level of everyday life rather than historiography. This can best be defined by asking what one must be to become a communicant of the essentially
incommunicable deep nation. To be a subject of England is above all to have been there -- one must have had the essential experience, and one must have had it in the past to the extent that the meaningful ceremonies of Deep England are above all ceremonies of remembrance and recollection. (85: emphasis in the original)

It should be recognised that particularistic experience is not in itself identical with imperialist experience - even though the latter, which is always normative and asserts its ruling image over others, depends so fundamentally on its imagination of the former....Deep England can indeed be deeply moving to those whose particular experience is most directly in line with its privileged imagination. People of an upper middle-class formation can recognise not just their own totems and togetherness in these essential experiences, but also the philistinism of the urban working class as [it] stumbles out, blind and unknowing, into the countryside at weekends. (86: emphasis in the original)

Deep England makes its appeal at the level of everyday life. In doing so it has the possibility of securing the self-understanding of the upper middle-class while at the same time speaking more inclusively in connection with all everyday life, where it finds a more general resonance. (87)

Despite his attempts to construct a repertoire of images for Deep England -- the point of the book -- it is an opaque England we are left with, the essentially incommunicable nation. Moreover, Deep England's framing of an everyday life, especially familiar to an upper-middle class formation suggests a consciousness and a politics similar to that of the Bloomsbury Group. With its appeal to a class fraction, conservation originally assumed, and to a large extent maintains, a decidedly upper middle class tinge, if not in social backgrounds then in identifications of its practitioners. Nonetheless, it is, in offering the possibility of a "more general resonance" and relevance that conservation has become a feature in the ongoing debates of contemporary urbanism. As a range of urban analysts have noted, conservation has become a fixture in discussions of collective memory, community preservation, neighborhood planning, residential and commercial revitalization in downtown and inner city fringes, and the problems of urban and environmental design (e.g. Barthel 1996; Boyer 1998; Hayden 1997; Zukin 1995).
Initially, I wanted to track this change at the level of the everyday life of the conservationist. The constellation of affect, style, and engagement that conservation circles offered resonated with Adorno's trenchant critique of the aestheticization of everyday life among the English upper classes, among which many conservationists have friends, colleagues, and relatives. I was curious about the tension between aestheticized privacy and the stylization of public activity that conservation held together. In an important sense, the conservationist set to work Lefebvre's problematic of rehabilitating everyday life. This rehabilitation is identical with its critique, and is split between the expressions of bourgeois subjectivity, that Marx and Adorno describe, and the potential of human production or action, ostensibly, as some kind of citizen within a public realm (cf. 89, 92-3, 127, 135; see 139-40 on the trapped parvenu).

Yet, in order to get close to conservationists, and beyond the relationship of ethnographer and informant, I wanted to become friends with the conservationists I had interviewed. However, given the relatively short time I spent with each of them, and the general generational difference, and my foreignness, that made friendship was rendered implausible. For them, as for all my informants, if I was interesting at all, it was precisely because I didn't fit their social categories. I was some kind of "American" researcher for them, despite my growing up in Toronto, Canada, and my statements of being born in London. Although I was visibly Indian/South Asian, my accent and social presentation revealed my (North) Americanness, such that I wasn't an Asian Londoner or Briton. Personally, I think that this made them more curious, because they took me as not knowing the social codes of a Londoner.
In any case, I soon realized that, no matter how many casework meetings I attended, or how many Victorian Society architecture tours I went on, I wasn’t going to get into the conservation world and its intimate sphere. I could, over my chain of interviews, get a vivid sense of what conservation was about, and as I will try to show in this chapter, and analyze how conservationists describe and understand the work they do. Yet, I would not become part of their everyday life. Instead, I have had to settle on my belief of the significance of historic conservation in re-animating the city, both physically in terms of its landscape and how its spaces are used, as well as emotionally, in terms of aesthetics and in attempting to satisfy our longings for coherent places. Through the course of fieldwork, I would think of it also as a key symbol of the growing role non-profit and voluntary activities play in the management and shaping of city space, which I describe in subsequent chapters.

The history of conservation, as policy adviser John Delafons (1997) has written, is one of a band of individuals protesting the threat to a particular building. The first conservationists, which include John Ruskin and William Morris, vociferous in their critiques of the detrimental effects of capitalist industrialization on artistic production, set up the first conservation body in Britain, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) in 1876. Today’s SPAB maintains a "structuralist" approach to conservation, preferring repair to restoration, and thus following Morris’s invocations against the restoration of medieval churches and Ruskin’s position that we have no right to touch old buildings.

The SPAB’s founding did spur initial preservation legislation, with the Ancient Monuments Act of 1882. Nonetheless, the next major conservation ‘amenity society’ did
not establish itself until the 1930s, with the Georgian Group forming after the loss of London’s Coal Exchange. The Victorian Society followed this pattern of forming in reaction to a crisis in 1958, this time over the loss of the Euston Arch, formerly in front of an unmodernized Euston Station. And, again, some twenty years later in 1977, the Thirties Society, later renamed as the Twentieth Century Society, formed to safeguard inter-war architecture.

The establishment each of the Georgian Group, the Victorian Society and the Twentieth Century Society is separated by a generation, indicating a slow, accretive process of re-evaluation of architectural merit. The period of building they seek to safeguard and the "taste culture" the architectural period suggests affect their ways of working and the membership they attract. So, the Georgian Group, as Neil Burton, its current director, openly admits, appeals to snobs and country house aficionados; and, arguably, its membership is most affected with the "cult of formally stylized living" that Adorno critiques in "Requiem for Odette." The Victorian Society, with its aim to preserve buildings built during 1832-1914, and thus taking in Britain’s Industrial and Railway Age, is decidedly less elegant, and broader in terms of appeal. Lastly, the Twentieth Century Society attracts younger members interested in modern and contemporary architecture and design. All three are organized as educational charities, whose casework committees and boards are run by volunteer architects and historians, with at most two or three paid positions. Many of their leading members, who take part on casework committees, have worked in conservation in the public sector, either in the old Historic Buildings Division of the former Greater London Council (GLC) or at English Heritage.
As an institutionalized practice, conservation originates in a number of legislative acts and organizations formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These include the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1882, the founding of the National Trust in 1895, and the establishment of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in 1908. In London, the Committee for the Survey of the Memorials of Greater London, or more easily, the Survey of London, got underway in 1894 under the London County Council, which had formed just five years earlier. Responsible for what is now inner London, the tomes of the Survey of London offer parish-by-parish architectural, social, and building development histories of inner London.

However, even the Survey, like historic conservation and town planning, did not take off until the 1940s, when the two Town and Country Planning Acts of 1944 and 1947 were introduced. The 1947 Act, passed by the post-war Labour government, revised the 1944 act, and included a slightly strengthened clause concerning building preservation orders. That is, the power to prevent serious alteration or demolition of a building considered historically significant. This 'consideration' would become institutionalized in Section 30, stipulating that the Minister (then the Minister of Town and Country Planning) 'shall compile lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest.' This section, which effectively initiated England's system of statutory listed historic buildings - 447,043 of them at December 31, 1994 -- was a result of an amendment proposed by the Marquess of Salisbury (Delafons 1997:60; Appendix D). Delafons quotes Salisbury's statement given in the House of Commons. Unwittingly, it
sets a tenor for conservation as a practice of evaluation needing connoisseurship and
taste, which cannot be given over entirely to the public realm:

It is at least doubtful whether the local planning authority are quite the right
people to perform this particular function. No doubt they are admirable from the
ordinary planning point of view. They may be expected to be skilful and devoted
in their work, but the preservation of buildings of historic and architectural
interest needs a specialized knowledge which I should have thought could not be
always in the possession of a local planning authority. So far as I see it, the
danger is not that they will include too much; the danger is that they will include
too little, and leave out of their list buildings which experts would include. It
may be that it would be important to preserve those buildings from the point of
view of our national heritage (60).

Delafons lets the Marquess' statement stand by itself, although adds that it "was
probably the first time that the term 'national heritage' was used in Parliament; certainly
I have not found an earlier one" (60). Yet, Lord Salisbury's statement is prescient in its
hint of the institutionalized multi-bodied conservation practice - the local planning
authority, central government, and 'experts' - and an early sign of the normative strength
of a rhetoric of national heritage. This rhetoric would allow for the promotion of
national heritage as an unexamined virtue, which the Tories under Thatcher would
elaborate some 30 years later. However, the Marquess' words and the push for
conservation have to be taken in the context of the late 1940s and 1950s, when the
aftermath of the second World War provided a catalyst for a government-led initiatives
in infrastructure. There was, of course, the earlier precedents of Ebenezer Howard's
garden city movement at the turn of the century. Nonetheless, it is during these years,
with the elaboration of the Labour-initiated British welfare state, that town planning
truly enters the national agenda. Bombed city areas were rebuilt, New Towns outside
Greater London's Green Belt were designed, and public housing 'tower blocks' put up.
In this expansionist period of public-sector building and development, conservation, despite the 1947 act, proceeds piecemeal. Rather, it is the experience of slowdown and stagnation of the 1970s and early 80s, of a landscape pockmarked by overbuilt concrete structures amidst crumbling inner city Georgian and Victorian row houses that had failed to be 'slum cleared,' that historic conservation grows, an aestheticization of everyday life in an ailing welfare state.

A DECADENT PRACTICE

"The last time conservation was really fashionable," Neil Burton said to me, "was in the early Eighties." This was a time when a concern over the loss of monumental architecture was reaching an apex. SAVE Britain's Heritage was drawing public attention to the destruction of Britain's historic environments. Nineteen seventy-four had been European Architectural Heritage Year, marked at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London with an exhibition aptly called The Destruction of the Country House.

As the icon of an aristocratic way of life, the country house compels auratic power over its viewers, including the members and tourists of the National Trust, which, since the 1940s, has accumulated a collection of country houses that have been given by their owners in lieu of paying death duties (Delafons 1997; Samuel 1994: 139). In addition, the country house is evocative of a more intimate everyday relationship to objects that have patina. Patina is the sign of wear and tear; with a building, patina would refer to descriptions of its character or charm ascribed to its by its virtue of
withstanding time. Arjun Appadurai (1996) mentions patina within an essay on the shifts of consumption over time. Citing Grant McCracken's (1988) work on patina in fashion, Appadurai writes that:

The problem of patina, which McCracken proposes as a general term to deal with that property of goods by which their age becomes a key index of their high status, disguises...the dilemma of distinguishing wear and tear. That is, while in many cases wear is a sign of the right sort of circulation in the social life of things, sheer disrepair or decrepitude is not...The patina of objects takes on its full meaning only in a proper context, of both objects and spaces for these assemblages of objects and persons who know how to indicate, through their bodily practices, their relationships to these objects; the English country house comes to mind as a good example of this complex set of relationships (1996:75; emphasis added).

For Appadurai, the country house is emblematic of a set of decadent practices, luxuriant and redundant, that organize relationships among people and objects within space and across time. The country house, as Marc Girouard's (1978) detailed study documents, is about these orderings of silver and servants; but it is also about the massive dwelling itself in a cultivated rural landscape. As a building which has lost or is threatened to lose its function -- in a sense what the V & A exhibit was about, and what SAVE and its allies in a growing heritage industry could traffic in - the country house emerged as a valuable object in the discourses and practices of British cultural identity. Despite the National Trust's earlier efforts, the country house went up for re-appraisal in the 1970s. With that period's economic gloom, two images of former national grandeur - Aristocracy and Empire - circulated madly on British (and international) television with such serials as Brideshead Revisited and The Jewel in the Crown. These stagings of objects and spaces suffused with aura and patina had reverberations in everyday life. On one hand, they provided a catalogue of images that could be marketed by interior
designers such as the old Laura Ashley (before her style was redesigned in 1997) and Ralph Lauren in the United States. Examining the public consumption of the country house, Samuel (1994) notes:

Through the instrumentality of the National Trust, which increased its ownership of houses from 17 in 1945 to 87 in 1990, the country house was able to rise, phoenix-like, from the ashes, to impose itself as the very quintessence of Englishness in the world of interior design; and to provide the leading idiom both for TV costume drama, and for the public museum’s ‘living history’ displays (233).

On the other hand, within a smaller fraction of the same class Lauren and Ashley appealed to, the country house provided a gathering point for an activist conservation. For Wright, this activism, with its art-historical approach to conserving buildings, suffered from a "Brideshead complex" (1991: 94).

In Chapter Four, I show how these issues come to a head in Spitalfields. There, in the late 1970s, conservation activists and aesthetes, having saved early eighteenth century brick houses from the wrecker’s ball of a large property conglomerate, cleared a space for the cultivation of an eighteenth century way of life. In the beginning they raised funds to purchase the houses and then sell them to a trusted friend or acquaintance who would ensure the correct repair of the houses. The money generated would then be put toward refurbishing another house, and the cycle continued. A historic buildings trust provided the organizational and management vehicle. This, subject to rumors that still circulate, created a rift between the Bangladeshi migrants who had made Spitalfields the entrepreneurial and residential heart of their diasporic British community. Nonetheless, it made conservation fashionable enough to be parodied in the New Georgian Handbook (Artley and Robinson 1985). Alan Powers, featured in the book, despite his own patch being King’s Cross, offers an explanation:
Alan: This book was published 1985, generative period, 83-84, that was when Reagan was pointing nuclear weapons at the USSR, the threat of nuclear war stronger than it had been since the Cuban missile crisis I think it is fair to say. And we had the Greenham Common women protesting cruise missiles coming into this country. Thatcher saying yes to Reagan about anything. We had just had the Falklands War. We lived through it, the way people always live through things but I think it was deeply undermining. We had the whole ghastliness of the 70s and oil crisis - things going bad, if not worse - totally out of control that period - dig down into the earth and try to keep it safe, dig back in to the past as a reaction to that -

Nityanand: For security?

A: I don't know if it's for security, but it is a very understandable reaction, a kind of game, a sort of urban pastoral. You are demonstrating a different, better ideal.

This fashioning of a better ideal reveals the desire for a secure and communicable environment that can anchor everyday life. As Alan tells it, it is partly about cultivating a hidebound aesthetics of everyday life in which the built environment could be mobilized to provide a less fractured identity during a time of pronounced economic recession. In a retrospective paper about the New Georgian phenomenon, Alan details this turn to aestheticism, writing that:

The defining characteristics of a New Georgian were passion for architecture, interiors and objects which was usually a professional involvement, more often as curator or conservationist than as a creative artist... It was an apocalyptic tendency... bringing personal emotion and theatrical flair into the bureaucratic worlds of conservation and museums, or the literally grey spaces of modern art. (Powers 1998: 1-2)

Situating conservation and its aestheticization of everyday life within Thatcherite economic and social reform, Alan sees the practices of the New Georgians, if only for a moment, as a "refusal to partake in modernity" (1998: 4). Although this refusal was elaborated in the interior space of the home, often a reclaimed, inner city terrace house, there was a connection to the everyday work practices in public sector conservation
teams or non-profit educational charities such as the Soane Museum in Lincoln Inn Fields.

The refusal of modernity, as Scott Lash and John Urry (1994) argue, is itself an expression of it, if "we mean modern in the sense of involving important components of reflexivity" (50). The anti-modernism of the Neo-Georgians, then, is an aesthetic expression of a reflexive relationship with the surrounding, post-industrial environment, an attempt to animate and understand it through conserving it. As such, conservation flourishes as an aesthetic politics of intimate knowledges of the built environment in which one lives and works against a stagnating, indeed restricting, late Seventies to mid Eighties British public culture. However, the second half of the Eighties changed this, with economic growth and a shift in the players of conservation:

The entry of the Prince of Wales into the arena of anti-modernist architectural criticism in 1984 launched a mass-movement in which the New Georgians no longer had a special place. Economic prosperity led to rapid urban redevelopment, and put an end to conservationist triumphalism. The abolition of the GLC in 1986 and the transfer of its famous Historic Buildings Division to English Heritage began the erosion of one of the New Georgian's power bases. The "heritage industry" described by Hewison over-popularised what had previously been a private cult and naturally devalued its cultural capital (3).

Powers describes the transformation of conservation's institutional base and socio-economic context as loss. The class-marked camaraderie of art and architecture historians at the Historic Buildings Division (HBD), which Andrew Saint describes below, and the appeal to everyday life to elaborate an urban pastoral, comes to be generalized. This fits Wright's definition of deep England: an upper-middle class appeal to everyday life but with general resonance. If we think of Deep England as a habitus, extending Powers' use of Bourdieu (1984), we can see how cultural capital works in a specific space and time. The specificity of conservation practice as both a professional
and domestic engagement involved a production of style, the 'New Georgian,' that was precisely the index of the practitioner's cultural capital. Once generalized in the circuits of mass media and the 'mass conservation' of English Heritage, once entered into British public culture, by the late 1980s, it became, like the country house, a mark of the past.

Importantly, the subsumption of the HBD into English Heritage eroded the de facto critical mass of an urban conservation ethos that had formed over the 1970s and early 1980s. Unlike contemporary municipal planning departments, which each have only few conservation officers, the HBD brought together 40-60 experts who defined London conservation policy en masse. As tends to be the case, this was both a limit and an opportunity. For example, Edmund Booth, an English Heritage planner for ten years and now a consultant, pointed out that, at the HBD, the focus was on 'set pieces.' that is, buildings as separate entities rather than assemblages of buildings in historic districts, which in Britain are called conservation areas.

Certainly, at King's Cross, as we shall see in the next chapter, such a predilection meant that the entity of a largely intact industrial railway quarter, with warehouses, goods sheds, cast iron structures, and workers' flats, was not recognized as worthy of designation as a conservation area until March 1986. In fact, this was a result of an enormous local activism and the King's Cross-St Pancras Conservation Area was one of the last the GLC designated before its abolition (see Stamp 1984; King's Cross Conservation Areas Advisory Committee [KXCAAC] 1990). In subsequent years, the work of creating conservation areas has flourished, with neighborhood conservation societies working in tandem with municipal conservation and planning officers.
Nonetheless, the precedent of active public sector expertise and involvement in conservation, architecture, and urban design issues was set by the HBD.

Saint, a scholar of the workings of the GLC's predecessor, the London County Council (LCC) (Saint, ed. 1989) and a conservationist at the HBD from 1974 to its abolition, explains the development of this expertise. He necessarily locates it within the growth of the public sector, from the Second World War to the late 1970s:

Andrew: After 47 Act the LCC begins to build up an expertise in historic buildings and it is an expertise which comes from, I think I do want to emphasize this bit, in three parts. There's a statutory part, there is a works part, and there is what you might call a historical research part. And people always move around about it. The statutory part was people who wanted to knock down or alter listed buildings, and they had to go through a hoop, and I am sure you know enough about the legislation to know that because a building is listed doesn't mean you cannot alter or demolish a building. It means you have to go through another hoop in the legislation before you can and with conditions attached to it. Statutory people are the people looking at the applications, they are dealing with the developer, the architect, they're taking it to committee and reporting back and negotiating between the applicant and the committee. The works people largely consisted of architects. They are maintaining historic buildings as the property of the council, which is quite substantial, by about 1965, and they would be giving advice of a practical kind and more recently, in the latter part of the GLC and the LLC, they are very much involved in the grants procedure -

Nityanand: grants?

Andrew: There were grants - I am not good on this. It's all complicated as you can imagine. Grants begin to emerge in a full way from about 1960 I think, but tend at first, don't quote me on this, I think they tended in the early years to go to big things like Westminster Abbey and all that, and that only later, did they percolate down to more modest Georgian houses. OK, there's works, there's statutory. And the historical research is curious because there is the Survey [of London] which has been there all the way along, and gets fairly attached if not completely attached to the emerging wing of the Architecture Department. The Architecture Department in the LCC was a big department because there were a lot of buildings [being] listed, housing included. And, in one corner of this were this quirky set of people who were doing historic buildings who were like completely different animals....In many ways historic buildings were hardly talked about it, and occasionally somebody would get the stack in my hand and say you should be building tower blocks, I suppose there is an element of truth about it, as it was the kind of pale end to the whole
architecture department. But it grew, and it grew to have a lot of respect, and I think the reason, this is where I tend to get propagandist I suppose, but I think it was successful because it combined these three areas in an interesting way.

Powers' sociology of the cultural politics of conservation correlates with Saint's narrative of the formation of an institutional conservation identity through work at the HBD. The economic stagnation of the 1970s allowed greater attention to building preservation. For the HBD, this meant a loosening of the clamp of development pressure on buildings in central London. With the buildings that were being redeveloped, the statutory people at the HBD would have greater leverage and many of the buildings would go to public enquiry. As Andrew remarks, "I think the other thing that kept morale quite high, in the Seventies and early Eighties, was that there were quite a lot of public enquiries."

Furthermore, for the conservation-minded first-time homebuyer, recession afforded the discovery of the increasingly derelict inner city, with its Georgian and Victorian houses needing repair work available at relatively cheap prices. It also initiated the shift of attention of conservationist cultural politics from the country house to the inner city, where politics could be anchored inside and on the street; where a house and a neighborhood could be rescued. Inside, an older way of life could be styled; outside, the conservationist could research neighborhood histories and vernacular architectures, and form local conservation societies. In this process, whole new artifacts, like brickwork and cast iron, could be re-evaluated and acquire the requisite patina. These objects, evocative of the now vanished industrial age, could then be recycled in the more expansive and putatively more democratic social world of the reclaimed inner city.
CONSERVATION IN THE NINETIES

"I don't think conservationists are all that interested in urbanism." ~ CC

"The best way to do any of this [conservation] work is as an ordinary person" ~ NL

"That's balls. They [The Twentieth-Century Society] are just like us. They're sexier...but they all started out as amateurs." ~ NB

"The Bangladeshis don't really care about the architecture. I mean, what do they care about English architecture that is three hundred years old?" ~ AB

"We get them [the community] involved baking cakes." ~ LP

In Chapter One, I discussed the relationship of gendering to the perceptions and experiences of urban space with the figure of the flâneur. With the conservationists, I did not directly ask about gender and historic conservation. As a practice that evokes and involves relationships of property, land, time, aesthetic cultivation, and emotional, even sentimental attachments, conservation traverses simple divisions of (masculine) desire to seize and possess and (feminine) romanticism. Nonetheless, when I asked Alan, Andrew, or Richard Pollard, the young director of SAVE Britain's Heritage—"How did you get into conservation?" I received anecdotes of boyhood interest in the old and the architectural, and about visiting churches with one's parents. When I asked several of the women involved in conservation the same question that elicited these narratives the tone and narrative of responses were markedly less self-conscious. For Elain Harwood, Catherine Croft, and Lisa Pontecorvo, conservation has been a commitment that has developed out of professional work and volunteer experience. It is
difficult to assess how these reveal gender at play in the production of conservationist identities. At the very least, they undercut attempts to see conservation as mere aestheticism and complicate representations of conservationists themselves.

I'll begin with Elain Harwood, who I think is one of the best examples of how the commitment to conservation is a result of - rather leads to -- a career trajectory. In this sense, it is a reversal of the male conservation career paths I have discussed above.

Nityanand: How did you get involved with?

Elain: I'm in it professionally because I work for English Heritage.

N: Before that?

E: Before that, English Heritage came first, because I was an English Heritage administrator, because I started from the bottom, not long after university, enthusiastic about buildings and conservation.

N: Did you study that in university?

E: No. I studied straight history.

N: Oh. I see.

E: But I was in Bristol, and Bristol in the late 70s was a very beautiful city.

N: But very derelict.

E: Right, right. Lot of run down Georgian, Victorian properties. And I started to read up about the subject, but I didn't know how to turn that enthusiasm. And suddenly, this job -

N: At English Heritage.

E: Yeah, and doing that kind of clerical work, and being surrounded around people with that kind of enthusiasm. It was a way of using their academic talents into something positive. Very few of them were actually involved in the conservation movement. But I had a brilliant boss who is retired now, but who suggested that if I was to learn more about the subject, that a very good thing to do was to join a number of conservation societies and to join the Victorian Society and the Society of Architectural Historians. You don't have to have an academic qualification. They do conferences, you can learn something over the weekend.
N: Really.

E: You can go on [to meetings] Victorian [Society's] Monday, Georgian [Group] Wednesday, Twentieth Century Thursday, can't remember who has Tuesday, and you can go -

N: Everyday.

E: Yes. It's typically retired enthusiasts. But, a place where you meet people, you've got a regular arrangement so you can go on, and there is a core of people in London where it is part of an everyday lifestyle.

N: That's exactly...

E: And that's how I got into it.

N: And, is [English Heritage] 10 years old?

E: English Heritage was set up as a quango [quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization] in April 1984. And before that, it was part of the Department of Environment, which was set up 1971, and which comes out of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and, which itself started appointing inspectors to do listing workers in 1943 or its predecessor did. The Ministry of Public Buildings and Public Works, which is responsible for the Ancient Monuments side, goes back to 1882. So preservation and conservation go back 110 years. Although the names change we are directly linked without a break. All that has happened is that we have been chopped from the main government and put into a separate outlet so that we could be more high profile. And the real reason is to [alter] government statistics, to reduce the number of civil servants, and now we have sponsorship from industry and benefactors can leave us money.

I used to work for Robert Thorne, after I started to get interested, I did a day-release course [in conservation] for two years...at the Architectural Association. I now teach on it. At the end of that, I worked for Historic Gardens for a year, and a job came up after the GLC was abolished... I made the swap - because it was shrinking. [Now] I've become an inspector - it just sort of happened.

N: How do you get the cases?

E: People like yourself, people like anyone, like Alec Forshaw, when the Twentieth-Century Society or Victorian Society will write -

[Elain brings a file over to the table where we are sitting in her kitchen in Islington]

Although English Heritage does the research and inspecting, final decision is made by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, because listing is a legal decision. English Heritage doesn't make the planning decision but the Secretary of State of Culture -- Chris Smith; his minister is Tony Banks.
[Looking at the Department of Culture's file, starting from the back]. The first page should be a letter from a local resident. They have to write to the Department of Culture, have to send it with a map, saying where they are... I go on the train and take photographs - living here, I don't need a car, and I am afraid of driving -- when I've been to see it, I have to write a report on computer saying no, yes.

N: Where do you go [to do the research]?

E: Depends on the building. For that [file on the table] builders - if they still exist, they have their own archives. RIBA [Royal Institute of British Architects] is my main source. For a Board of Education building in Birmingham. I have to go to Birmingham.

N: You are one of 6 people who do this; why did it come to you?

E: If it has the words post war on it, it comes to me.

N: So you are the only one for the whole country.

E: Yes...I get one a day...I probably have to do more research than the others. It’s a new subject. I have to write a report, then take it to committee because they are post-war, because post-war listing is still is regarded as sensitive, and there’s a question of whether we should be looking at buildings that are so young.

Elaine candidly describes her work as the inspector for post-war buildings at English Heritage, one of six such inspectors. This is much smaller than the forty-fifty odd people at the former Historic Buildings Division, and is minuscule when you consider that more than a thousand people, including architects, surveyors, and planners, work at English Heritage.

Among other things, English Heritage is responsible for advising on applications for historical designation, and the alterations and changes of use of buildings on the national statutory list. It provides and publishes leaflets on preserving and restoring buildings. On occasion, as in the case of King’s Cross, where the Channel Tunnel Rail Link threatens the collection of buildings that makes up its historic railway quarter, English Heritage published a position statement and is an official consultee to the whole project (English Heritage 1997). It also undertakes studies on building types, the most current underway being a 'historic corridor' study.
With recent shifts in policy, English Heritage is regionalizing itself. However, as a quango, as Elain explains, it does not hold the ultimate decision-making power over the fate of a jeopardized listed building or the listing of a new building. Hence, English Heritage is not a directly accountable public body; elected officials do not head it up. As a quango with a large number of employees, it symbolizes the professionalization of historic conservation.

In addition, it points to a shift in the organizational structures with agencies that have a purported "civic" intent: that is, whose decisions affect civic spaces. This shift, itself part of a calculated Thatcherite policy to make official government smaller, has allowed for a proliferation of quasi- and para-public bodies and a host of non-profit, community and voluntary sectors concerned about shared urban spaces. One example of this is the Theatre’s Trust, where Catherine Croft now serves as historic buildings inspector.

Catherine had been a caseworker at the Victorian Society before completing a postgraduate degree in Early American Culture at the University of Delaware. She came back and started to work for English Heritage, and at the same time, she got involved with the Twentieth-Century Society as a member. Along with Alan and Elain, Catherine remains active in the Twentieth Century Society; in 1997-98, she was chair of the Society’s Cases Committee.7

As I discovered in conversations and a spirited response letter, some members of the Twentieth Century Society, perhaps because of their focus on twentieth century architecture and design, have an aversion to the term conservationist. For them, it smacks of amateurism. Catherine still cares to use the conservationist label, seeing it as
a process of determining suitable new uses for older buildings. She did this kind of work at English Heritage, replacing Neil Burton who had moved to the Georgian Group, and does this now at the Theatre Trust, which was formed in 1976 to preserve live theatres. As inspector, she travels around Britain to look at theatres and determine what changes would preserve the theatre in use, or whether the only way for it to be in use would for it to be a club, or a theatre with a café/shop.  

When our conversation moved to the question of public and private urban spaces, I mentioned that the new British Library's piazza wasn't that open, with its cast-iron overhanging, its security guard, television monitoring, and its square walled-off from the street. She commented on how Trafalgar Square was left to the tourists and the pigeons, and that the British were not great public square/piazza people. But she asked if one could sit in the square and eat one's lunch, and I said that I had not seen many at all, although perhaps because it was February. Since the Theatre's Trust endeavors to recontextualize older theatres in urban centers in the 1990s, where the entertainment landscape has become diffuse and takes on multiple forms, I had thought that conservationists at the Theatre Trust would have an interest in urbanism. Alas, Catherine responded, "I don't think conservationists are all that interested in urbanism."

Her observation lingers, precisely because conservation does re-interpret older, and produce new urban landscapes, and is, a practice, an appendage to planning department and architectural consulting firms. On the one hand, it reflects the tendency of conservation and its academic partner, architectural history, to focus on the historic building as an objet d'art at the expense of a changing spatial context. On the other, it may illustrate the astute application of scarce resources; conservation relies on the
energies of many people who volunteer their time and run non-profit conservation societies. As such, it differs from profit-driven architectural, engineering, and construction firms, or public-private regeneration companies that can make the production and management of urban space a central concern. Hence, conservationists may cultivate an interest in urbanism, but this is necessarily secondary to protecting historic buildings. Nonetheless, Edmund Booth, a former planning at English Heritage, and now a planning consultant to it, mentioned to me that English Heritage was just discovering that it had been playing a role in urban regeneration since the distribution of the first of its conservation grants in the 1950s. Moreover, if you look at a district’s or borough’s experience of conservation, you see a similar process: conservation exerts a considerable pull on how the urban landscape is managed; Islington, which extends north of the City and east of the Railway Lands, is a case in point.

The borough is notable for its energetic and effective municipal conservation program, led by Alec Forshaw and a team of three. Forshaw was for a long time the only conservation officer in Islington’s planning department; English Heritage, which has devolved greater work and responsibility to the local level, is currently funding the additional conservation officers. In the late 1960s and 1970s, an incoming, owner-occupying middle class bought up Islington’s relatively large number of Georgian and Victorian terrace houses. These houses had gone through a cycle. They had been built in the mid 1700s and 1800s for London’s middle classes, and had become rundown over the twentieth century, and been inhabited by its working classes.

Islington has thus received some attention as a gentrification case (Lees 1994; Lees and Carpenter 1995; Pitt 1977). Its Barnsbury, Canonbury, Clerkenwell, and
Highbury neighborhoods have all become prestigious areas where property prices of £500,000 (approximately $800,000) are not uncommon in a borough in which nearly half the population still live in public housing. The Angel, where Upper Street begins, is the heart of the borough's commercial district. It flourishes with all the trademark signs of the established cultural quarter: eateries, antique stores with a biweekly market, artisan and design boutiques, a local street market, Chapel Market, and the bustling Islington Business Centre, situated in the old Royal Agricultural Hall. The Angel also sports traditional "high street" stores such as Marks and Spencer, includes a branch of the major supermarket chain, Sainsbury's, and has attracted Bluenote, a popular club to relocate from Hoxton in July 1998.

As a result of all of this activity, the relationship between historic conservation, and the increasing land value of both residential and commercial properties, set the scene for how conservation is perceived and carried out locally. Lisa Pontecorvo, on the management committee of the King's Cross Railway Lands Group, with a background in working with films as historical documents for television, got into conservation as a new local resident of one of Islington's desirable squares in the mid 1980s. She describes well the limits of conservation's aesthetic politics at the levels of locality and community. In the following fragment, Lisa talks about her efforts to create a new conservation area around the fractured remains of a more Victorian and working-class Islington area called Gifford Street, an area where many turn-of-the-century railway workers at King's Cross lived.

Lisa: Well, the thing about Gifford Street, is that historically in Islington - maybe elsewhere I don't know, there has been a tendency to look for architectural set pieces. What tends to get less attention is the unbeautiful, industrial building which is perhaps
not part of a complex but is interesting in and of itself. You get this in the country, where farming buildings don't get looked after. A few years ago people looked down their nose at Victorian buildings and it was all Georgian, now Victorian is fashionable again. You get these phases in conservation and it has to do with what generation and time think is interesting and beautiful. I was necessarily starting from the social history side. I know English Heritage does things like list gasometers and list post boxes because they are aware...but the amenity societies, I'm talking your average conservationist.

Nityanand: Who are interested in beautiful buildings?

L: Yes, not all of them, but conservation has a sort of element of prettify your property because then it goes up and that sort of thing. The problem with all of that is that it goes against thinking of it being a social impression of whatever it is, whether it is industrial, or poverty, or whatever. I think Gifford Street is marvelous because it is all that is left of the working class Islington that was next to the railway lands. People made their living off the railway, there were some buildings for "deserving" poor which were put off, two chapels. The idea was that the deserving poor needed their own churches because they wouldn't come to St Andrews, in Thornhill Square, which was middle class, etc., etc. So, coming from Glasgow, which is an industrial town, and which has a lot of industrial set pieces which are being redeveloped - so when I saw Gifford Street in one street or two streets - it captures Victorian social history, it has the board school for "the deserving poor." it's got these two chapels that I mentioned, one on either side of the road, no longer has the tenement blocks, all in a nutshell, the stables which were used opposite the Railway Lands.

N: But you couldn't get much support?

L: It was quite extraordinary, this Gifford St campaign. It got subsumed with the CTRL that was going to be built behind it, but I do intend to come back to it, to make it a conservation area, and then you won't get planning troubles and people building things they shouldn't. A third of the borough is conservation areas. And, Conservation officers don't want the extra work of planning applications. But only 50 people live there, so there wouldn't be many. In Thornhill Square there are 100 and there are only 2 or 3 [planning applications a year].

But the interesting thing about the Gifford Street Conservation Area battle was that the community that wasn't living there said that 'we like it.' We collected 600 signatures; [by comparison] we had 900 signatures against CTRL. Obviously people living in Gifford Street did sign but there are only 50 people living there. Interestingly English Heritage was lukewarm supportive, but didn't want to offend the conservation officer. So there was this extraordinary situation where people outside the area like friends of mine in the Highbury Fields Association were totally supportive, and you had people who said, "we can't have things like that be a conservation area, it is going to denigrate the whole notion of a conservation area". Basically, the Islington Society wrote letters to that effect. And in fact, people like Randal Keynes from Keystone Crescent and people like myself actually resigned from the Islington Society.

N: So Randal Keynes supported it.
L: He always supported because he was a member of KXCAAC [King’s Cross Conservation Areas Advisory Committee]. I am on very good terms with most members of the Islington Society, but I ceased to be a committee member.

N: So you don’t go to their meetings?

L: I go to their lectures, I go all the time, in fact I went last night. But, I don’t go — they have a subcommittee that deals with the nitty gritty — to their meetings. So Gifford Street is how you push forward the boundaries, just like when I was doing my film and history work it was pooh-poohed by your average historian that film could be a historical document.

N: But is [conservation] an expanding network, is it maybe 30 people?

L: No, I would say it is not an expanding network because people move on, you know -

N: But does it keep growing, or does it replenish itself?

L: It replenishes itself, but always by the same process.

N: What do you mean by the same process?

L: Oh, people who move into the gentrified bits and they'll join the Islington Society. I don’t think conservation need be a middle class property thing, but it tends to be. I’m not very interested in all that prettifying stuff.

N: But this [her living room in an Islington square] is a pretty place.

L: Oh yes, but I am not interested in that preserve your property, and obviously property preserving is something you do when you are a bit older. I am much more interested in education.

Lisa points to the limits of an expansive conservation practice, shaking its genteel middle-class image. For her, it has to be about social history and pedagogy rather than aesthetic enhancements to neighborhood property. Her effort to have Gifford Street become a conservation area is perhaps why the work of conservation is seen as amateurish - it involves the local person doing research about often ordinary buildings, and their lackluster inhabitants. Despite Gifford Street’s merits to be a conservation area in a heavily preserved borough, in a neighborhood to the west of leafy Barnsbury and north of trendy Upper Street, it was criticized by local conservationists because it threatened the notion of conservation as a device to maintain high property values, and
along with it, exclusivity. Their reaction only reinforces a prevailing view of the class (and race) biases of neighborhood conservation, the limits of Deep England values to reach broader publics with whom they share the reclaimed inner city.

On the other end of the conservation spectrum are the national amenity societies, themselves caught with the problem of image within changing configurations of urban issues and local publics. William Filmer-Sankey, the current director of the Victorian Society, is himself an 'outsider' to conservation, an archaeologist by training and someone who had not been involved in any of the conservation societies.

William: The Society has changed, it has tried to change its image. The Society had a reputation of being very negative, you know, saying no, no, and not understanding the constraints developers or churches were under. And we have made a big effort to be more pro-active, to go out and tell people what we believe, and why we believe. We produced a leaflet on the Victorian Society position on church building, something we haven't done before and also we got out and meet people more, and get engaged in negotiation with schemes.

When we were considering the strategy for the House of Lords, we could have got in there and said, we think this is actually frightful you know, and we don't think it should happen, and the committee would have said, 'thank you very much, but it is going to happen.' Instead we said we think it is wonderful news that the CTRL is coming to St. Pancras, but we are still worried about this and would like this changed. And the committee said, 'thank you very much you should be involved with the scheme as it emerges.' That has gained the society more credibility. I suppose, people are more willing to listen to us, because they know the Victorian Society is not going to say no, that this is awful when it really thinks something is absolutely frightful. Most times it will say, 'yes, but let's talk about the details.' If we said no, this is frightful, it is like the boy who cried wolf, no one is going to listen to you. Both sides have moved closer together, the developer is beginning to speak the language of conservation, and the conservationist is understanding parts of the developer, and to reach agreement somewhere of the middle. The danger of that approach is that a compromise can be struck as a sign of weakness. And I think there are cases where we should say no, we won't compromise, but we compromise in order to stay in the game.

I set this up because that's my own belief that, I think it is very important that conservation, the building conservation movement should be seen as part of the wider green environmental movement, and not seen as a kind of academic specialism that is only partly relevant to green issues. I think it is very important, very central to environmental, to wider environmental issues. It is certainly hard to get involved on more of that kind of level. That is very difficult.
William's words leave us with the conundrum of a more expansive conservationist politics. Environmentalism is known for its white, middle-class orientation that is akin to conservation. Nonetheless, as one of the 'new social movements,' environmentalism does resonate among minority communities in the US, where African-Americans and Latinos, citing the greater likelihood of hazardous waste sites and garbage dumps and being situated in their neighborhoods, campaign for environmental justice. In Britain, unequal access to green space remains a significant issue for council housing tenants, many of them newer Black and Asian Britons.

The link between conservation, environmentalism, and racial minorities -- returning to my opening comments about diasporic cultural practices -- is the imagination and use of space. It is in the migrant lived spaces of the inner city that the potentially Anglocentric aestheticization of everyday life can confront its limits and transform itself into a more expansive cultural practice. Conservationists, for example, can ask how old, formerly industrial spaces are being re-used by migrant entrepreneurs, such as a former pub becoming the Al-Nehar Mosque at King's Cross. In addition, the already established architectural pedigrees of industrial buildings can be excavated to expose the commercial and physical apparatus of British imperialism, incorporating the ancestors of Black and Asian Londoners within an earlier global system that they now seek to analyze in their cultural practices. An excellent example is the West India warehouse in the Docklands, described by Robert Thorne in a June Victorian Society tour as one of the two most important industrial buildings still standing. Such an approach thus links historic conservation with the politics of diaspora and postcoloniality.
To conclude, the cultivation of conservation as habit, as part of one's everyday life, is likely - according to most of the conservationists I interviewed - a temporal response to space under erasure. This cultivation refines a certain desire and sensibility that sees architecture not merely as space, but in terms of time. I would say that conservationists are not particularly concerned of architecture as space in and of itself, but as a space evoking a particular time period to be revived, salvaged, re-articulated in the present. Often, as the country house, and the derelict Georgian terrace house suggests, it is a specific aestheticized space-time of a living space from a period whose actual lifestyle is no longer available.

Nonetheless, conservation gives access to a larger temporality in which one can see oneself engaged, as a scholar, as an architectural judge, as a critic, and/or as an urbanist agent. This is most clear in the formation of a cultural and political public sphere around the issue of heritage. This embraces institutions such as the former HBD and now English Heritage, and the cult of the New Georgians, and includes the BBC television show "One Foot in the Past" in which many conservationists have taken part and even hosted. Conservation gives room for the amateur, for various kinds of civic acts concerning the urban landscape or the rural townscape, for membership in a cultural movement concerned with the politics of time played out in an increasingly ethnically, racially and culturally heterogeneous British space.

However, it is the make-up of this new space-time configuration that has yet to be addressed by conservationists. The possibility of a shared space-time in the global city, figured by the West India warehouse in London, and explored in the very different metropolis of Los Angeles by Hayden (1997), can be found in the fragments and ruins of
the built environment. Otherwise, the shared temporal landscape of the 'we English', the supposedly conservation-minded nation, remains cut off, and cuts itself off, from the migrant and diasporic formations that increasingly make up and define 'new Britain'.

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1 Historic conservation is British usage, comparable to the American term, historic preservation. Too often preservation means the ossification of heritage, such as in the construction of 'heritage sites' or 'historic parks.' Conservation, on the other hand, connotes the management of a resource, and a politics of use. This sense of the word was repeatedly stressed during my various interviews with conservationists. Hence, risking the confusion for American readers, I have retained British usage and have tried to convey this aesthetic politics of the built environment through the chapter and dissertation.

2 Here is Habermas (1989) at length, describing the intimate sphere and its pivotal role in the subject formation and socialization of the bourgeois public:

In the intimate sphere of the conjugal family privatized individuals viewed themselves as independent even from the private sphere of their economic activity - as persons capable of entering into "purely human" relations with one another. The literary form of these at the time was the letter (48).

The self-interpretation of the public in the political realm, as reflected I the crucial category of the legal norm, was the accomplishment of a consciousness functionally adapted to the institutions of the public sphere in the world of letters. In general, the two forms of public sphere blended with each other in a peculiar fashion. In both, there formed a public consisting of private persons whose autonomy based on ownership of private property wanted to see itself represented as such in the sphere of the bourgeois family and actualized inside the person as love, freedom and cultivation - in a word, as humanity (55).

3 It is the precisely the similarity of educational backgrounds and class positions that makes possible an ethnographic interest in London conservation from a non-Englishman such as myself.


5 In Appendix D, Delafons lists statistics of the number of listed buildings and conservation areas at the end of 1994, and the changes from 1993 to 1994. In England, for example, there were 447,043 listed buildings, of which 6,078 were Grade I. There were 15,429 Scheduled Ancient Monuments and 8,375 conservation areas. From 1993 to 1994, 4,129 buildings were newly listed, 368 conservation areas were designated, and 542 buildings were added to the Schedule of Ancient Monuments. Statistics are taken from the English Heritage Monitor (English Heritage and English Tourist Board 1995).

6 Alec Forshaw is the chief conservation officer for the London Borough of Islington.

7 When I said that most of the people I have interviewed have been born in the 1950s, she said that she was younger, thus making her one of the two conservationists I met who had yet to reach their forties. The other is twenty-something Richard Pollard, the director of SAVE Britain's Heritage.

8 Older cinema houses, on the other hand, are going through a revival and are increasingly being recycled, even in unfashionable places such as Stratford, east London.
Forshaw did not support the designation of a Conservation Area for the vicinity of Gifford Street.

Randal Keynes is a former Management Committee member of the King's Cross Railway Lands Group. As a high-ranking civil servant, Keynes told me, rather modestly, how he was able to quietly generate support in the House of Lords against the British Rail-sponsored King's Cross Railways Bill. This bill, passing through Parliament in the early 1990s, would have permitted the construction of a low-level international Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) terminus at King's Cross, causing considerable amount of damage to the area. The bill was eventually defeated in 1992. Interestingly, Keynes is also active in the Victorian Society.

William is referring to the deposition of evidence regarding the CTRL Act (1996).

William is taking the lead in opening this issue to the conservation world. In my recently received March 2000 issue of The Victorian, the magazine of the Victorian Society, he writes in the Director's welcome:

> With the constituent countries of the UK seeking to establish separate 'national identities' and to find 'icons' for their identity, images of cathedrals and villages are easily called into service. When it comes to the nineteenth century, the images are positively hostile. To British Asians and Afro-Caribbeans, a Gothic Revival Church is an alien architectural style, belongs to a religion which they may well not share and, worst of all, represents a period of colonial repression and injustice. So is 'the heritage' (together with those organisations which depend upon it, from the National Trust to the Victorian Society) to remain the preserve of the white population? For its own future, it must not. All who care for the past must rise to the challenge of keeping it relevant. We must do this not by appealing to misty nationalism but by showing how the past allows us to understand the present.
CHAPTER THREE

THE POLITICS OF COMMUNITY AT KING’S CROSS, THE LARGEST REDEVELOPMENT SITE IN LONDON

(Image 2) King’s Cross Landscape: looking west towards King’s Cross Station from the rooftop of Instrument House, 207-209 King’s Cross Road, WC1

For some people, King’s Cross is neither a historic industrial railway quarter nor a zone of political activity that opposes the impending arrival of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and its terminus. For them, it is a seedy, red-light district. For others, diversely black, brown and white, but uniformly young, King’s Cross is Bagley’s Warehouse and the Cross, landscape of all-night rave parties in the Railway Lands.¹ By the late 1990s, King’s Cross was something else for that elusive species I’ll call ‘urban adventurers’; namely, a place to encounter wine bars along wharves or in former stables, subterranean art spaces and to attend private parties in a former coach repair depot.
Yet, for most, King’s Cross is about changing trains: underground, commuter, and long-distance to north-east England and Scotland. I may have got a glimpse of this King’s Cross on a sunny, mid-August day in 1996 when I was coming from Edinburgh. I had to catch a commuter train to Sutton, South London. Normally, I would go to Victoria by tube and then take a Network South-Central train down to Sutton. But, I had a suitcase that I didn’t want to lug around in the Underground. So, I decided to take Thameslink, a popular commuter train that runs north from Bedford through central London down to Brighton and had occasional service to Sutton.

I could have avoided the street altogether. However, that would have met dragging the suitcase through a set of underground tunnels. Shorter would be to step outside the automatic doors of King’s Cross and cross York Way and go up Pentonville Road to the King’s Cross-Thameslink station. And, so I stumbled, dragged the suitcase and can recollect two images: one, being struck by the heaviness of King’s Cross’s exterior architecture; and two, seeing a thin young man and woman, both dressed completely in red. Such is the state of London street fashion that I didn’t see people wearing red the following year when I came to do fieldwork.

Since there are readers for whom King’s Cross is not in their mental map of London – nor yet ‘revitalized enough’ to warrant a few photographs and a paragraph in an offbeat tourist guide – I’ll begin with Mike Leigh’s 1988 film High Hopes, which begins and ends with shots of the King’s Cross district at the edge of central London. In narrating a specific form of everyday life at King’s Cross under threat in
the late 1980s, the film speaks to the modality of agency of our next urbanist agent, the community planning activist.

*High Hopes,* like Hanif Kureishi and Stephen Frears’ *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid,* are Channel Four productions of London’s everyday lives and spaces under Thatcherism and its effects on maintaining an oppositional metropolitan subjectivity. In *Sammy and Rosie,* such subjectivity forms around politicized spaces of intimacy—the bedroom, the living room, the kitchen, and the fancy restaurant, the last a sign of 1980s conspicuous consumption. The film’s characters negotiate racial, gender, sexual, and postcolonial identities in a south London landscape shaped by racial rebellion, urban decay, and rampant land speculation. Leigh carries over this concern for understanding change in London’s landscape in *High Hopes,* casting a satirical light onto inner-city gentrification around King’s Cross, where most of the characters live. Rather than the jerky montage narrative of *Sammy and Rosie,* Leigh uses an exaggerated documentary or realist form to focus a cinematic essay on the conditions of 1980s London.

King’s Cross and the characters who live at its center—Cyril and Shirley—are the conscience of the film, and at the same time, symbols of a political era that is disappearing fast. Cyril works as a motorbike courier while Shirley is on the dole. They live in a flat in Stanley Buildings, between Pancras and Cheney Roads and behind two monuments to Victorian industry and modernity, King’s Cross and St Pancras railway stations.

The film begins with a narrow shot of a young man climbing the stairs to the street from the King’s Cross-St Pancras underground station. The shot gradually
widens to reveal Gothic and ornate St Pancras station in the background. In the next scene, the man is on Cheney Road and stumbles into Cyril, taking off his motorcycle helmet after a day at work. The young man is lost, looking for his sister's flat but with an incomplete address. Cyril invites him up to tea.

Upstairs Cyril and Shirley are hospitable. Leigh exaggerates the young man's plight. They crack jokes about their cactus named Thatcher — a "pain in the ass," — and a smaller plant named Dennis, (a reference to Margaret Thatcher's husband), and are bemused by this young man who doesn't know what cabbies are and has seemingly never been up to London. The kindness of Cyril and Shirley is a recurring theme in the movie. It is demonstrated in the generosity of the couple to the young man. He returns later that night and they offer him their 'spare room,' and again the next night, while he is still on the search for his sister.

More important is their care of Cyril's elderly, widowed mother. She lives, as we see in the next scene, in a street of fairly undistinguished Victorian, yellow-brick terrace houses. Yet, as we soon learn, she is the last council, i.e., public housing, tenant on the street. The incoming middle class has bought up the other houses, in a classic case of gentrification. We see the example, again exaggerated, in the yuppie couple next door, who arrive in a Saab decked out in garish finery, and proceed to talk in high-pitched clipped English about how many oysters they just had at a cocktail party. They have made improvements in their house, they have no visible children, and we see a shot of the empty street from inside their sparsely furnished living room. Next door at Cyril's mother's the tone is somber as tea is
drunk, until Cyril’s sister Valerie arrives in a leopard print skirt, her voice shrill and her energy anxious.

Cyril and Shirley, the couple next door, Mother, and Valerie and her husband represent the four character types Leigh proposes in an analysis of Londoners and everyday life in the late 1980s. Cyril and Shirley are still identifiably working class, dependent on and defenders of the welfare state, even as it shrinks. They are socialist, and while they leave his mother’s house Cyril mutters about how Mother had voted Tory last year, and the futility of being a working class Tory. In bed with Shirley that night, as the young man sleeps in the ‘spare room,’ Cyril tries to express his frustration of what’s happened to his idealism. Yet, by saying, “I am scared of getting bitter,” Cyril avoids discussing Shirley’s desire to have a baby. This subject returns in a scene the following day at Highgate Cemetery, north London, at Karl Marx’s tombstone, in an angry exclamation that Thatcherism is taking away the rights of the working class. Yet later that night, in a rehearsal of the theory/activism divide so familiar to intellectual dialogue, and in response to Shirley’s question, “what do you do?” Cyril responds cuttingly, “I sit on me arse.”

In Cyril, Leigh has cast the disillusioned subject of Thatcherism - the white, working-class man. When it comes to his mother, however, we get a more general sense of elderly neglect and abuse, highlighted in the scene where Valerie drags her mother to the table for a birthday drink, and becomes angry when she refuses champagne and asks for tea. Worse still is the maltreatment she faces at the hands of the gentrifying homesteaders next door. Earlier that week at the pharmacist’s Cyril and Valerie’s mother realizes that she has left her prescription, along with her keys,
at home on top of the television. When she calls on the woman next door, she faces a tirade of abuse, infantilized, but finally let in, albeit without the old woman’s shopping cart. The woman calls Valerie, who we see is in the middle of strenuous aerobics, to come and bring her key and collect her mother. Valerie tries to get her husband, who owns a mini-cab dispatch service, to get one of his employees to do it. He refuses and so she prepares to come into London, but not after she phones Cyril and makes it sound as if their mother has had an accident.

Meanwhile, the woman next door is quizzing Mother about the conditions of her house. She complains that the old lady doesn’t garden, that the house needs paint, and when she learns that it is still council property, she launches into how she could buy it from the council and sell it to people who could use the three bedrooms and “keep it up.” Here, Leigh weaves in one of Thatcher’s important interventions in inner-city housing markets: the “right to buy” scheme where council tenants were encouraged to buy their properties at discounted prices. Politically, this was controversial, at once bringing the working class into the much-cherished Anglo-American ideal of home ownership as it took scarce multi-room housing out of the public sector. In the scene, then, we watch the discourse of privatization, gentrification, and the dispersal of working-class residents transacted around a dining table, in a “conversation” between two neighbors who are icons of two antagonistic Britains. Valerie and Cyril finally arrive and rescue their mother. They prepare to leave, but not until Valerie tours the gentrified house, laughing nervously, “It’s amazing what you can do to a slum.”
It is the birthday party for Mother that marks the apex of the film’s narrative, preparing us for the denouement and the film’s conclusion. Cyril and Shirley drive to Valerie’s suburban house on his motorcycle. Valerie’s husband brings Mother in the Mercedes. Valerie greets everyone in a hat that imitates her mother’s neighbor, in a vain effort to secure upper middle-class sensibility. Rather than playing hostess, she gets irritable and drunk, leaving Shirley to face -- with deadpan sarcasm -- advances from Valerie’s husband, also drunk. The guest of honor is quiet. Only later, when brought back by cab with Shirley, do Shirley and Cyril listen to Mother’s utterances, painful, sad flashbacks from her girlhood.

The old woman’s flashbacks parallel the rejection of memory in the contemporary metropolis, where public spaces erode in the fervor to mold the formerly industrial, inner-city areas into a landscape of consumption. This “memory crisis,” in urbanist Christine Boyer’s words, is a product of our contemporary practices of imaging and revitalizing the city:

If the purities of modern urban planning have left us face to face with displacement, disengagement, and disenchantment when it comes to the urban experience; if the visualizations of multinational capitalism present an array of positions juxtaposing homelessness and luxury spaces, soup kitchens and haute cuisine, smells of decay and obsession with perfume ---- then today’s memory crisis seems to rest on our need to interweave disjunctive and noncommensurable images to establish connections across the city and reappropriate its utopian promise (1998: 28-29).

It is deriving a sense of hope from the city’s closely-knit physicality, of smelling possibility rather than decay, which lingers in the last scene of High Hopes, on the rooftop of Stanley Buildings, the next morning.
Looking south at the collections of Victorian industrial buildings between St Pancras and King's Cross stations, from the rooftop of Stanley Buildings, Stanley Passage, NW1

The old woman, looking south to the railway sheds of King's Cross and St Pancras, listening to the sounds of the trains, hears Cyril remember out loud that her husband and his father had worked on them, and says, "it's like being on top of the world."

The film closes, as Cyril, Shirley and Mother stand on among the heroic signs of Victorian engineering and enterprise, a formerly industrial area caught in the teeth of a service-sector-driven global economy. It is indeed a high hope, a century after its hey day, to reimagine inner-city working-class neighborhoods as more than fragmented remnants of their former selves.

Part of a genre of the wry "new British cinema" funded by independent media companies such as Channel Four, *High Hopes* is a detailed sociology of King's Cross before the debacle of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and the politics of community and land use that it activated. It is before 'regeneration' became an everyday word at King's Cross. Certainly, it poses the problem of community, sense of place, and oppositional politics against the monumentality and physicality of the railway landscape of King's Cross. It asks about the relationship between people and the
environment in which they live, but from a distance: King's Cross is still a screen on
which to set to work a general critique of Thatcherism at the level of the inner city.

*High Hopes* evokes King's Cross as a memory archive of the industrial age,
where a working-class male identity was cogent. It suggests the inescapability of
time, where its notable brick architecture, acquires patina – wear and tear, aging
without being destroyed. This stands in contrast to the "machine-made materials of
today - scaleless sheets of glass, enamelled metals and synthetic plastics – tend[ing]
to present their unyielding surfaces to the eye without conveying their material
essence or age," (Pallasmaa 1996), against time and memory. So, perhaps, in this
sense, Mother is a metonym for the area -- old, rich with rejected or silenced
memories, but useful for excavating new understanding and thus not to be neglected.
Yet, the desire to recover memory sits uneasily with the demand for economic
growth, and King's Cross is no exception.

Moreover, it is this rejected memory and the growing consciousness of being
displaced – either by yuppies or more likely, Asian and African migrants -- that is
key to the formation and subsequent ethos of the King’s Cross Railway Lands Group
(KXRLG) in 1988, the same year as the making of the film. Furthermore, I would
suggest that if the specific agency of the conservationist was marked by the
beleaguered upper-middle class subjectivity of a narrowing fraction, then the leading
members of the KXRLG are on the end of the same shortening stick. Their
subjectivity, as largely members or descendents of the former industrial working
class, eviscerated by the transformation of London and Britain into service-based
economies, is no less beleaguered.
The KXRLG was formed in opposition to the proposals to build the international terminus of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) at King’s Cross. The proposed link would have caused widespread destruction of residences and small business east and southeast of King’s Cross Station. The underutilized land north of the stations was to be restyled as a new Office City, a “European” quarter at the heart of Britain’s largest industrial railway landscape.

So, within the story of King’s Cross that I want to tell is the spectre of Europe. The CTRL would after all link England (and with scheduled rail improvements, Scotland and Wales) to France and Belgium and thus the whole continental rail network. Among the community planning activists, the regeneration bureaucrats, the historic preservationists, and the local politicians, however, it wasn’t the worthiness of this project as a national commitment to Europe that mattered. Rather, the fight among these actors was about claims to King’s Cross space, how it was supposed to be transformed from a railway quarter into an “urban village,” for what intentions, and for whose benefit.

In order to tell the story, I need to show how the old architecture of a declining industrial and railway district becomes a site for an insurgent community planning. This requires getting a feel for the weighty architectural and social history of the quarter. Much of this work began to be seriously documented in the 1980s, instigated by historians in the former GLC’s Historic Building Division and Gavin Stamp, a prominent architectural historian who lived in King’s Cross during the decade. His report to the GLC committee in 1984 was a departure point for the architectural conservation of King’s Cross and part of a movement to re-evaluate the worthiness
of industrial buildings more generally (Stamp 1984). It reveals the problem of an aestheticist approach to representing the built environment, the consequences this approach has for historic conservation, and the impasse that arrived when the first redevelopment proposals were leaked.

I will begin with a tour of King's Cross, starting with King's Cross station, from which the district takes its name.

King's Cross Station:

Standing at the junction of the major west-east route, Euston Road, and York Way, King's Cross station was designed by Lewis and Joseph Cubitt and completed in 1852. Built on the site of a former smallpox hospital and about a hundred houses, it became the London terminus of the Great Northern Railway in 1850, precisely to handle the huge amount of travelers from northern England to the 1851 World Exhibition (Bishop 1988; GLC 1985: Appendix 1). Architecturally, King's Cross station is known for its vaulted, arched arrival and departure halls, whose twin arcades are separated by a square clock tower, and its cast-iron facade, exemplifying a strong engineering style which has held its own in the face of later additions. These include the building of the first suburban platforms in 1875 and an iron and glass canopy against the lower part of the facade, to make a new carriageway arcade (GLC Appendix 2). The low-level front, on temporary planning permission since 1973, provides interchanges to the six underground lines, as well as space for shops, fast food joints, ticket booths, and the taxi rank.
West of King's Cross is St Pancras station. George Gilbert Scott built the ticket halls and the enclosing hotel, while Barlow and Ordish constructed the massive iron train shed. It was the terminus of the former Midland Railway and was one of five railway stations that were built in the 1860s. St Pancras is the only one to have remained structurally intact. Scott finished the Midland Grand Hotel, now known as St Pancras Chambers, only in 1876. His Gothic Revivalist style has Italian and Flemish Gothic sources, and his building materials -- red and grey granite, beige stone and bright red brick -- came from Nottinghamshire (GLC Appendix 3).

Beginning in 1935 the hotel's rooms were used as offices, but these have long been vacant and in disrepair.

The vastness of King's Cross and St Pancras stations, as in Leigh's film, are stand-in representations for the whole district. Yet, rather than relics, they anchor a still coherent industrial railway landscape, the survival of which is crucial to understand the ensuing struggles over redevelopment. In fact, the interest in preserving King's Cross emerged from the increasing "desire to protect the best and most characteristic examples of Victorian townscape from unsympathetic or excessive development" (GLC 1985: 2). Stamp, in his report to the GLC's King's
Cross-St Pancras Joint Advisory Committee, argued that the quarter is “of particular architectural and social interest in London,” even if it is not one of the city’s most beautiful. He lists a number of reasons, including its street architecture, a result of “mid-Georgian road improvements and late-Georgian housing improvements.” These, he continues have been “comparatively unchanged for almost a century.” Other reasons for designation include the mixture of “industrial buildings concerned with water and rail transport, Victorian and early twentieth century housing blocks, Georgian terraced housing, and a number of other building types of interest.” These include the assemblage of buildings along the Regent’s Canal that runs through the breadth of the north side of London, such as the Granary and the Coal and Fish Offices (images 7 and 8 below).

Indeed, key to the development of King’s Cross and its local economy was technological advances that allowed the transport and distribution of such goods as coal, grain, potatoes, and fish. The Regent’s Canal (above, photograph taken from Goodsway, along the north bank of the Canal, with view of St Pancras and King’s Cross stations) was built from the early 1800s. Opening in 1820, it enabled the exchange and distribution of goods from northeast England. Goods traveled down the coastline, up the Thames, and through the Regent’s Canal, where they were distributed to London’s markets. Its function, however, was usurped by the coming of the railways hardly two decades later.
Built in 1851, the same year as King’s Cross station, it originally provided interchange access for both rail and water. The rail lines came directly from the north to the back of the Granary where goods could be hoisted and stored in its bays; the canal basin was on its front. Before the basin was filled in with concrete, goods would have been shipped by barge into the Regent’s Canal. Importantly, it is still in industrial use. As the photograph suggests, the filled-in basin is a parking lot for shipping trucks. It is grade-I listed, and on a Victorian Society tour on an early June afternoon in 1998, historian Robert Thorne described it as one of the two most important surviving warehouses of the nineteenth century, the other being at the West India docks.

At the curve on the Canal stand the Coal and Fish Offices. Across from them are the western and eastern Coal Drops, where coal was loaded off the trains and directly onto horse carriage to be hauled around London (Hunter and Thorne, ed., 1990, Parkes in personal conversation). Beside it are the remnants of Plimsoll’s Viaduct. As Thorne explained during the Victorian Society walkabout, Plimsoll was a coal merchant who shipped coal from Nottinghamshire to London, and used the King’s Cross goods yard. In order to circumvent paying carriage and rent, he patented his own system of coal drops, from which less dust was emitted, and built his own railway viaduct across the Regent’s Canal to his own coal drops.
Although the coming of the railway in the 1830s would displace the Canal, it served as a useful site for the nascent gas works of the Imperial Gas Light and Coke Company, the largest in London by 1869. The reminders of these are the famous local landmarks, the cast iron linked gasholders, which incorporated Tuscan and Doric columns and elaborate latticework. Designed by Kirkham, built by Clegg, the gasholders were put up between 1861 and 1887 (Sladen and Stamp 1988).

(Image 9) Gasholders in the Sun

In the shadow of the gasholders are four gas-worker cottages, themselves examples of early steel construction by British Gas in the 1930s. More extensive and preceding this example were Culross Buildings built for rail workers in 1890 and owned by British Rail, and Stanley Buildings. Sydney Waterlow's Improved Industrial Dwellings Company built Stanley Buildings in 1865 as one of the earliest examples of philanthropic housing for workers.
These residential, industrial and transport buildings that form the heart of King's Cross are impressive remnants of nineteenth century industrial urbanism. They bring to life the musings of Walter Benjamin's *Passagen-Werke*, about which critic Susan-Buck Morss notes that, "It was in buildings for the new mass culture that the principle of iron and glass construction proliferated, at first 'under the banner of purely utilitarian buildings': 'iron halls' were built as warehouses, workshops, factories, covered marketplaces (*Les Halles*) and railway stations, (*Garde* [sic] *de L'Est*)" (1989: 129).\(^5\) It is the interface of iron with brick that defines the potency of King's Cross's architecture as an expression of growing British industrialization, symbolized by the emergence of rail technology and travel. Each private rail company had a London terminus, giving the capital a dozen railway stations – Waterloo, Victoria, Paddington, Liverpool Street, Charing Cross and London Bridge are the major remaining ones. The companies competed for passengers, publicizing their lines with picture postcards and using the architecture of the stations to communicate what we today call corporate identity. The London Midland Railway that built St Pancras used the brick and stone from the areas the line served – Derby,
Leicester and Nottingham. In the new mass culture of the nineteenth century, the railway station thus represented both the rise of new transportation and material technologies as it made architecture a sign in the circulation of mass cultural products such as photographs and postcards, rendering architecture ‘modem’, according to Beatriz Cololina (1994). With the erosion of the industrial landscape in the late twentieth-century city, the signifying practices of its architecture have only intensified, so that the King’s Cross area, the site of Britain’s largest of such landscapes, is arguably the most filmed locale in the nation.

This aesthetic appreciation of the artifacts of the industrial past is very contemporary. At King’s Cross, and besides the filming which may date from the 50s, with the Ealing Studio’s Ladykillers, the assessments of the quarter’s industrial warehouses, goods yards, and residential buildings for potential historical designation and the exhaustive archaeological surveys were only carried out when the first proposals to build the CTRL link were leaked in 1987. Moreover, King’s Cross and St Pancras, Stanley Buildings, the Granary and the Coal Drops, though anchoring the King’s Cross Railway Lands, represent only a portion of the King’s Cross industrial and railway quarter.

St Pancras, for example, had its own goods station in the west, on the site now occupied by the new British Library, which, after some 20 years of construction, opened its doors to the public in October 1998. The red brick arches of the former Somers Town Goods Station, mimicking those of St Pancras, have been left standing at the back of the library, guarding a future construction site for the CTRL. On the eastern flank of King’s Cross, in Islington, are an assortment of late Georgian
buildings erected in the 1860s and 1870s following the construction of the Metropolitan Railway and tunnels that linked to the Great Northern main line (Sladen and Stamp 1988).

(Image 11) One of these, at the former entrance to the Underground, the ‘Lighthouse’ Block (above), is a local landmark. Formerly premises for small industry, such as printing, manufacturing stainless steel equipment, a clock factory and a garment sweatshop, they now house furniture stores, taxi repair garages, luxury car washes, fast food joints and convenience stores, as well as the small Courtyard Theatre and Cubitt Gallery (below).

(Image 12) The “Laundry Building”, with the agitprop billboard, houses artist studios and an alternative gallery. To its west, at the far end of the photograph, is the flank of King’s Cross Station.

In fact, this mixture of small business, cheap consumption and artistic production spaces indicates how the architectural grandeur and past industrial prowess is being re-inhabited ‘from below,’ on the street. The storage warehouses,
furniture and artist workshops and the collection of taxi and car repair garages, are replicated, along the railway arches that extend behind St Pancras Station.

Across King’s Cross is the pastel landscape of more fast food joints, sandwich bars, video arcades, and a foreign exchange/hotel booking outlet. Moreover, rave clubs, such as the illustrious Bagley’s, have injected a nighttime economy that thrives in the cavernous spaces of the western Coal Drops.

Below: Bagley’s in the Railway Lands, near the Granary

Visualizing King’s Cross as a specific landscape of work and leisure resists its museumification as an outdoor heritage site. Indeed, it is King’s Cross’s landscape of work that vividly documents the decline of the manufacturing economy of the
world’s first industrial nation and its transformation into one driven by service sectors. That the decline of King’s Cross, as a result of the increased use of road rather than rail to haul freight, dates from the 1960s, the decade in which this transformation began, further reveals the effects of waning industrial capitalism on the urban landscape. Moreover, since public sector interventions, beyond local council housing and services such as schools and libraries, have been scarce, the area’s decay reinforces the power of capitalism’s traces.

These traces form around the rejected parts of an older industrial capitalism that so greatly shaped King’s Cross’s character. Despite the tendencies for nostalgia and countless opportunities for romanticism, the richness of these traces make issues of everyday life, sense of place, community, preservation, memory and revitalization very relevant. They raise concerns regarding the perspective urban analysts employ to re-visit King’s Cross’s past and reclaim its spaces and the changing relationships that Ackbar Abbas has described as between space and affectivity (1997: 73).

Fortunately, the transformation of King’s Cross is nascent, only having begun in the mid 1990s after decades of neglect. It is telling the story that leads to this impending change, from a industrial railway landscape to what the King’s Cross Partnership calls “a new cultural quarter for London,” to which I now turn.

WAITING TO BECOME

After about six weeks into my volunteering at the King’s Cross Railway Lands Group, towards the end of November 1997, I went to a lecture by Mark Cousins at
the Architectural Association in Bedford Square, Bloomsbury. The next week, an undergraduate student in geography dropped by for information on the group. I finished giving a summary on the “current situation,” the first of many that I would do over the next year, she asked, “why have patience, why hope?”

She was referring to the group’s long-standing opposition to large commercial redevelopment in the Railway Lands and its various efforts to ensure community participation in the process. I had mentioned the uncertainty of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link coming into the area to St Pancras Station, and the sense of impasse with a still unresponsive King’s Cross Partnership, the public-private partnership corporation formed to steer economic and social regeneration in the area.

The lecture by Mark Cousins was on the New, a genealogy of it as an idea in Western thought. It included a description of waiting for it as an ‘agonizing cultural activity.’ Indeed, ‘waiting’ is an accurate description of the community activists at Railway Lands: waiting for a decent development on the human scale better that would better fulfill local housing, employment and recreation needs. Waiting for the new, the new St Pancras, the new CTRL: a way to is question our belief in progress, the distractions of late-modern life, and commitment and engagement. ‘Why wait,’ said the geography student, ‘why hope?’

These questions dangle as I asked my own to friends and some of my commentators in the field: what exactly do these people want? What do they expect? In order to reach answers to these questions, however, I’ll need to give a history of the activities of the King’s Cross Railway Lands Group (KXRLG). Parts of its first five years in existence, corresponding to the struggle to defeat the first
CTRL plans, have been written about by planners (Edwards 1992; Fainstein 1994: 1214-129, Parkes 1995a). Although I cover this period, roughly from 1988-1993, it is during the following five years when notions of community and its representation, until then quietly assumed, begin to fall apart.

The King’s Cross Railway Lands had been a neglected section of London for some decades. Since the 1960s, with the closing of freight transport on the Canal, and the ongoing decline of goods haulage on the national railway network, the area had been ripe for an urban regeneration strategy. The first public indication of figuring a new future for the ailing quarter was in 1967. At that time, British Rail announced its intention to demolish St Pancras Station and sell off King’s Cross Station and the land surrounding it. British Rail would amalgamate rail services with a newly built more “modern” station. Opposition to the scheme was spearheaded not by any local community planning or conservation group, but by the Victorian Society. The Victorian Society defeated British Rail by using what historic conservationists in Britain call “spot listing.” Spot listing involves putting pressure on the Minister responsible for historic buildings to designate or upgrade a designation of a building of “special historic or architectural interest.” The procedure saved St Pancras from demolition when it was upgraded in 1968 from the now discontinued category of grade III listing to that of grade I.

By pushing for listing, however, the Victorian Society was perforce compelled to look for new uses for St Pancras Station, and the Midland Grand Hotel, now called St Pancras Chambers, which forms its massive facade. However unintentionally, this
move accomplished two things. First, it marked the trespassing of conservation onto urban planning. In the years after the saving of St Pancras, the Victorian Society actively canvassed support for alternative uses for the seemingly redundant St Pancras. These included ideas and plans drawn for a national railway museum, a community sports center, and a scheme to return the Midland Grand Hotel back into use as an upscale hotel. Second, it shone the first of a series of spotlights on King’s Cross, drawing public and media attention to the grandeur of a grimy district.

Attention to King’s Cross resurfaced in the 1970s, with the debates over building a new British Library. The current site is in Somers Town, a neighbourhood of near exclusive council housing blocks, some architecturally worthy enough to have been recently listed, west of St Pancras. The site was chosen after organized citizens further south in Bloomsbury refused an expanded library there. As part of a sweetener for Somers Town residents, who would had to endure some twenty years of construction, council housing would be built on part on the northern part of the site. This has not happened nor is it likely.

In retrospect, the British Library case represents the emergence of an antagonism among local residents in how land and property are developed in their immediate neighborhoods. The King’s Cross Railway Lands Group would mobilize such antagonism and translate it into a politics of community planning in the early 1990s. The concerns over housing and community uses, unheard in the 1970s, would become central to the platform of the KXRLG a dozen years later.
The KXRLG remains proud of its origins at a packed meeting of some 400 people at a local theatre, Theatro Technics, in 1988. The meeting had arisen in protest of the leaked proposals of British Rail to redevelop the semi-derelict railway lands at King’s Cross by building the British portion of the CTRL. As a condition made by the Thatcher government, the link would have to be funded by the private sector. The scheme, awarded to prominent architects, Norman Foster & Associates, planned to subsidize the building by massive office development on the Railway Lands. The link, to come from south-east England through east London, would have entailed massive destruction of residences and small businesses, on the eastern side of King’s Cross, as well as the demolition of the eastern half of industrial buildings along the Regent’s Canal.

Opposition to the Norman Foster plans involved intertwined issues of historic conservation and city planning. A group of concerned local resident historians and architects coalesced and quickly formed the King’s Cross Conservation Areas Advisory Committee (KXCAAC) in 1989. Members came from various conservation-minded societies, including the Camden Civic Society, and the Victorian Society, and the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society, and the committee produced detailed briefs of the architectural and historical value of the buildings in the King’s Cross Railway Lands (KXCAAC 1989). These discussed the merit of the particular industrial buildings as well as the integrity of the several conservation areas at King’s Cross. Since conservation areas contain listed and historically interested unlisted buildings and are the responsibility of the local
authority’s conservation team, the KXCAAC was able to talk effectively talk about the sense of place and the character of the district.

Rather than blanket condemnation, the briefs differentiated areas that needed to be protected from those which could be sensitively redeveloped. KXCAAC’s efforts were buttressed by similar objections by historians at English Heritage, the quango responsible for the historic buildings in England, and the Victorian Society. Importantly, the concerns of the conservationists were shared by the local KXRLG activists. Beyond the intended massive destruction of small business and homes, and the loss of industrial heritage, whose importance was only beginning to be determined, it was the scale of Norman Foster’s plans that angered both constituencies. These included an extensive office development surrounding a low-level international terminus and twin office towers where a group of industrial buildings stood in the northeastern section of the Railway Lands. Both the conservationists and the KXRLG activists felt that the steel and glass “Office City” proposals totally disregarded the spatial form of the Railway Lands. For the conservationists, this meant that rather than rehabilitating and recycling existing buildings, or constructing new structures sympathetic to the varied scale of King’s Cross, the Office City would kill the diversity and mixture of use of the Railway Lands. For the community planners and activists of the KXRLG, Norman Foster plans had no engagement with the needs and aspirations of King’s Cross’s current residents and workers, an area of poor housing and high unemployment. The plans pitched a new “European” commercial and financial center for London without any consideration of the “local.”
In response to these circumstances, the KXRLG set out to generate larger community opposition to the project. Changes to railway lands and priorities, under a British legal statute then in force, required the successful passage of a bill through Parliament. This was the King's Cross Railways Bill. In the public inquiry held in the Houses of Commons and Lords, KXRLG assembled various spokespeople to explain local opposition. They joined the Victorian Society, English Heritage, and the KXCAAC in giving testimonies in front of the Parliamentary Select Committees adjudicating the bill. Rather than being merely dismissive of redevelopment in general, the group's testimonies were backed up by well-researched, locally generated proposals for alternatives. In fact, I would argue that it was the search and refinement of alternatives that distinctively mark KXRLG's field of strategies. For the group not only campaigned for an alternative redevelopment at King's Cross. They actually submitted their own application for a community-led regeneration of the area with the local planning authority, Camden.

The impetus for the planning application was steered by Michael Parkes, part-time planning consultant at KXRLG since 1990, who had held a community planning workshop during the original meeting at Theatro Technis. Parkes had been working in Spitalfields with a host of Bangladeshi organizations interested in devising a community development plan (Parkes 1995b). He had run the free-service planning charity, Planning Aid for London, for a time. Inspired by the broad interest generated by the meeting, and with the financial support of an interested property
developer, Martin Clarke, Parkes took up the challenge and began to orchestrate a Planning for Real exercise for the King’s Cross Railway Lands in 1989.

Planning for Real is a technique developed in the late 1960s by Tony Gibson, in which people living and working in an area affected by a redevelopment scheme – the “community,” or “local people” – actively participate in the planning process. It involves constructing a model of the area, and then creating differently coloured cards indicating various kinds of land uses (Parkes 1990: 60). These would include residential (affordable housing and housing on the open market), workspaces (offices, light industrial uses), leisure (sports facilities, community centres), open or green space. People determine how they prefer land being used by placing appropriate cards on the different parts of the model.

In the King’s Cross version, such cards were used, as well as others which asked how existing buildings would be better used, including derelict and listed buildings, and whether landmarks in local conservation areas needed preservation. Parkes reports that some 330 people participated in the process, and nearly 3200 option cards were employed. The Planning for Real exercise was also accompanied by consultation about which existing local needs, for housing, green space, children play areas, etc., should be met in any regeneration scheme, in order of priority. Over the summer of 1990, the exercise -- including the model, itself built with the help of secondary school students, -- was taken to five local elementary schools. The KXRLG staged a Planning for Real exercise in each school.

The results were published as The People’s Brief (1990) and made available to a group of architects that Clarke had assembled. Known as KXT, the architects used
the information to develop an alternative plan for the railway quarter, that included a CTRL terminus at King's Cross, but with land uses that reflected greater community benefit of regeneration. The plan would then be filed with Camden, and thus represent the community voice in the larger designs for regenerating King's Cross. Unfortunately, at one of a series of presentations with the community, disagreement broke out over the amount of affordable housing provided versus the number of offices. People, including members of the KXRLG, disputed KXT’s proposed route for the CTRL link into King’s Cross. Along with other concerns, these led Clarke to withdraw financial support and KXT disbanded.

However, with the help of voluntary work two young architects, Mark Scott and Daniel Mouawad, Parkes used the KXT work as a blueprint for two KXRLG planning applications that were filed with Camden in late 1991. These incorporated work done by the planning economist and KXRLG member, Michael Edwards, which calculated the amount of offices necessary to subsidize much needed affordable housing. With these figures in hand, the group devised one application, mapping the Planning for Real results onto two proposed revamped Railway Lands. One had no CTRL terminus at all. The other, presciently, had the link skirting around the Railway Lands and coming into St Pancras.

Though at the time of filing, the King’s Cross Railways Bill was still being heard in Parliament, two facts were becoming clear. First, there was a growing assumption that the redevelopment proponents, London Regeneration Consortium, had greatly overestimated their ability to raise funds to finance the CTRL construction. Second, also related to the first, was the collapse of the London
property market, which soon revealed a surplus of offices. With the help of Randal Keynes, KXRLG to persuade peers on the House of Lords Select Committee to directly ask the promoters of the Railways Bill whether they could finance construction. When the promoters confessed in Parliament that they could not, the King’s Cross Railways Bill fell apart.

The combined fall in the property market in 1991-92 and the defeat of the Railways Bill gave KXRLG some breathing space. The ensuing removal of development pressure on the Railway Lands provided a window of opportunity to develop strategies for temporary uses on underutilized sites and buildings on the Railway Lands. These could potentially address the concerns for affordable housing, employment, green space, leisure, and the conservation and re-use of the many historic industrial buildings that were voiced in the People’s Brief.

While the government announced its preference for a re-launched CTRL link coming through east London in tunnel and over the existing North London line into St Pancras in 1993, KXRLG was busy investigating temporary or interim uses. The group solicited assistance from a host of organizations ranging from a self-build housing trust to URBED, a progressive and creative inner city development company. In this way, they were able to propose a set of mechanisms and strategies in which these temporary uses could be realized. The group also studied current uses of premises in the Railway Lands, including patterns of ownership and leases, which gave a sense of the oligarchic property-holding structure in the district. It was also at this time that they began to contemplate a more entrepreneurial approach to
community planning and development, the community development trust. Here, local resources and services – anything and everything from housing provision, workspaces, day care centers to small business assistance and job training – are acquired and managed by community residents (see Monaghan 1994; Wilcox 1989). KXRLG published the whole range of possibilities as the *Interim Uses Initiatives* (1993), a document that remains central to the group’s vision for a refigured Railway Lands as a community-managed “urban village.”

The *Interim Uses Initiatives* attempted to meet community needs through re-thinking the resources already at hand (such as old buildings), obtaining a range of expertise, and articulating a way forward that was reliant on neither the municipal planning authority nor large commercial interests. In this sense, it represented a shift in the usual practices of urbanism in London. It was an “insurgent urbanism,” one that combined the utopian impulses of the group and the focused urgency of community sentiment with a program for action.

Anthropologist James Holston uses a notion of the insurgent to talk about the potential of multiculturalist and identity politics, themselves intensified in urban areas, to redefine a concept of citizenship, based on the city rather than the nation (1996). In his discussion of insurgent citizenship, Holston argues that the “estrangement of the social,” a legacy of modernist architecture and city planning, can thus be mitigated. Although the KXRLG did not emerge out of a rainbow coalition, it, in its making King’s Cross an arena for insurgent politics based on lobbying, widespread local consultation, as well as devising alternative land use
plans, nonetheless activated a notion of citizenship that explicitly identified itself with an urban area. Its planning activism re-animated politics in a historically working-class, ex-industrial and railway quarter. It also transformed a rhetoric of class familiar in British social and political life to one based on community: that is, a politics focused on improving local amenities and opportunities for an increasingly socially diverse King’s Cross, and demanding that the management of local resources be further decentralized to the community level.

One of the best local examples of this community planning activism involved the Coal and Fish Offices. The London Wildlife Trust had commissioned a study to investigate how the Coal and Fish could be brought back into use, and thus serve as an excellent catalyst for Railway Lands regeneration (London Wildlife Trust 1988). The buildings had sustained a great deal of damage, including losing its roof, in a fire in 1983. National Freight Corporation, the owners of the Coal and Fish, had planned to demolish them. The local council, Camden, with pressure from concerned residents, used the collection of building’s location in the Regent’s Canal Conservation Area to block demolition permission, one of the major control mechanisms that Conservation Area legislation provides. It went to public inquiry, which ruled in favor of Camden. NFC appealed, but failed to win.

Despite the fire, a structural survey carried out by Alan Baxter and Associates confirmed that the Coal and Fish were structurally sound.\textsuperscript{10} KXRLG commissioned URBED to do a report on the viability of the Coal and Fish as a community-managed building. The URBED report, published in the \textit{Interim Uses Initiative}, focused on how the substantial amount of money required for refurbishment could be raised by a
trust created to develop it as a community resource (Parkes and Mouawad 1993: 116-31). From its first discussions in 1991, KXRLG saw the Coal and Fish Offices as ideal for a local urban studies and heritage center run by a community development trust. The URBED report also explored the feasibility of a range of community uses, such as an urban studies and heritage center, exhibition rooms, and offices for community groups, which would need to be subsidized by retail-generating uses such as a waterfront café, and renting space for functions (125-26).

Unfortunately, all these plans were thwarted in the summer of 1998, when NFC put up scaffolding on the Coal and Fish with the intention of doing the external repairs themselves, which cost about £600,000 ($1,000,000). By November 1998, NFC was actively pursuing a tenant, which would simultaneously serve as a public relations vehicle for a company with a shoddy local reputation as well getting someone else to help foot the million and a half dollar bill required for internal refurbishment. More significantly, the Coal and Fish was lost to the development trust ideal that the KXRLG had cherished for a number of years. It was a symptom of the changing politics of determining urban regeneration at King’s Cross that I discuss below, which has left the KXRLG with a smaller piece of the pie.
The Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL)
The Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act was passed by the previous Government – construction work is due to start in this area in 1997. London & Continental Railways (LCR) are the developers who are building the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and the new CTRL terminal at St Pancras. They were given – free – a large part of the King's Cross Railway Land by the Government. This includes St Pancras station, which LCR intends to double in length and to widen by adding extra tracks for commuter services from Kent.

The effects in the areas around the stations will be drastic:
1. Demolition of 1-10 Stanley Buildings, Gasworks Cottages, Station Community House and housing association flats on Park Road.
2. Old flats in Stanley and Leaden Buildings will be uninhabitable during 8-year construction period.
3. Copper Lane and Clyde Court severely affected by construction disruption.
4. More than 80 local businesses displaced, with little or no compensation.
5. Local people will be living next to one of the largest building sites in London for 5 years, with access roads closed, causing great inconvenience to residents.

(Image 15) A page from KXRLG's only glossy and bilingual newsletter sent out in November 1997, describing the impact of the CTRL construction on local residents in the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) area, which forms the "King's Cross being regenerated" by the King's Cross Partnership.

In 1993, the British government revived the plans for a Channel Tunnel Rail Link, this time following a proposed route that was less destructive and went into under-used St. Pancras station. However, there were complications. The construction of the CTRL was tied to a series of rail improvements. This included upgrades to escape routes in the London Underground, of which King's Cross-St
Pancras is the busiest station and where a 1987 fire left 31 people dead. It also involved re-situating King's Cross Thameslink station, a well-used (and lucrative) north-south rail service running from Bedford in central England through London down to Brighton on the south coast, underneath St Pancras station, under which the route runs. Although the new CTRL route was less destructive, it would still involve partial or total demolition of at least fourteen listed historic buildings in the King's Cross Railway Lands, and moving other listed structures, including the gasholders. It would also require the demolition and rebuilding of the west flank of St Pancras, in order to allow for an extension of the existing railway shed, double the number of platforms, and facilitate the building of the new Thameslink station.

Instead of following the existing provisions under the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, the alteration and demolition of listed buildings of listed buildings would be governed by a "Heritage Deed" listed as annex of the CTRL act, rather than by existing provisions in the 1990 Town and Country Planning acts.

Conservationists, co-ordinated by the Victorian Society, protested in the CTRL hearings in the House of Lords the fact that the Heritage Deed all but removed building controls for the listed buildings, including watering down the statutory consultation process with conservation advisory bodies (which normally would have included the English Heritage and the Victorian Society. With the Heritage Deed, only a relationship of advice between the construction undertakers and the conservation bodies was set out. Whether it was taken would be up to the design team at the chief contracts of the CTRL construction, London and Continental Railways (LCR). English Heritage was more amenable to accepting the Heritage
Deed restrictions, and did not give a statement at the public inquiry. The director of the Victorian Society, William Filmer-Sankey, did, and although little could be achieved in terms of St Pancras Station, the Society did manage to get assurances that the gasholders would be dismantled, stored, and then re-erected.

Preservation issues also concerned the KXRLG, but more as a supplement to the group’s larger issue, transport. Under the CTRL provisions, trains coming to St Pancras would stop at Stratford, in east London. However, part of the financial deal for the CTRL was European Union money that would encourage suburban commuters in Kent to come to London by train. As a result, St Pancras had to be extended to accommodate suburban and international trains. The KXRLG argued that this was a waste, that suburbanites could make use of the excellent public transport at Stratford to come into central London. They thus argued that trains ought to split at Stratford, with only international passengers coming into St Pancras. They also argued for the revival of CrossRail, much supported by the financial denizens of the City, an expensive, underground rail through the center of London, with connections to Heathrow Airport (KXRLG Carrion 1998; press release December 1998).

The focus of the group’s attention to the transport issues of the CTRL Act resulted in less empathy to the micropolitics of the CTRL Act in the communities living on the Railway Lands. Some of the buildings scheduled to be demolished included Culross Buildings and apartments 1-10 of the Grade II-listed Stanley Buildings. Since the 1970s, both had developed a strong community of residents, who had squatted the then derelict apartments built in the last century and, in
exchange for doing up the properties themselves, earned short-life leases from their owners. Stanley Buildings belonged to Camden Council; Culross, as former property of British Rail, was gifted to LCR by the government as a sweetener to help make the CTRL happen. For the tenants of Culross, unlike that of Stanley, this would mean no compensation package. Unsurprisingly, the issue of money led to a weakening of ties of interest between the KXRLG, an umbrella group, and one’s tenants’ association. While the KXRLG campaigned on larger transport issues, its members in Stanley or Culross Buildings were fighting for compensation deals. Even though both groups had an ostensibly shared interest in the environmental effects, with the tenant groups, this was becoming a variety of NIMBY politics, albeit in the inner city.

Such a stance seemingly undercuts the acquired contradictory image of King’s Cross, one of economic hardship tinged with equal doses of street glamour and urban pastoralism. You can see glimmers of it in High Hopes, in Julie Lowe’s attempts to build a spiritual eco-village on a derelict plot behind King’s Cross Station that I describe in Chapter Five, but especially in the passages of former local squatter Aidan Dun’s pastoral epic-poem Vale Royal (1995). Ray and Una, active members of the KXRLG and participants at one time or another on the group’s management board, describe, and perhaps live, the contradiction. They present the transformation of High Hopes character Cyril’s disaffection and the general disenfranchisement of the leftover working class into a modality for a local, planning-based activism.
Born in west London and raised in Norfolk, Ray came to London with a bunch of friends in the early 1980s. Born and raised in Edinburgh, Una arrived in London in 1983 on a holiday and never went back. Neither had the money to afford central London rents, so they squatted and worked their way through school. Ray did his ‘A’ levels at what is now North London University in 1988-1989, before going on to the London School of Economics, where he obtained a BSc in Industrial Relations and a MSc in Social Policy Housing in 1997. “Everything,” he says, “pointed towards housing: my squatting, my political activism - housing seemed to me the most obvious thing to do.”  

Their descriptions of squatting culture and their initiation into housing politics shine a spotlight on the Thatcher years, a collective memory on its way to the dust heap as the contours of the “new cultural quarter at King’s Cross” begin to take form.  

Ray:  So there were properties that were run down and were going to remain run down for years on end, because [the councils] had on money to do them up and they couldn’t rent them in that quality. **So squatting was massive in central London. We saw it as a political act.** Basically, if 5 of us got into a 2 bedroom flat, and lived in a 2 bedroom flat which is what we did most of the time, 5 people were saving the local authority a lot of money. Because [otherwise] they would have had to pay housing benefit every week for us to some unscrupulous landlord of 90 pound a week. The council was losing 47 pound a week if they could let that flat, but they were saving up to 450 pounds a week in housing benefit. 

Nityanand: So you were actually saving the state money.
R: We were saving them money. [I learned all of this while] I worked for a squatters' organization called ASS.

N: ASS?

R: Advisory Service for Squatters. In Balls' Pond Road. Basically, I worked for them; that is where all these ideas came up.

N: When was this, the mid 80s?

R: 87 to 89, voluntary work, and mainly dealing with their legal stuff, because they thought I was that kind of person. Um, advising people on the legal status of squatting, how to squat legally.

N: 87 to 89, you could still squat?

R: Oh, you can still squat now.

N: Really, but I thought they changed the Criminal Justice [Act].

R: Yes, they did, but only for flats which were basically available to be let. You can squat commercial buildings, warehouses.

Like I said, I went into housing [i.e., at LSE]. At the end of my second year, I got involved with the King's Cross Railway Lands Group. 1992-1993.

N: How?

R: I went to a festival to pick up leaflets for KXRLG and said yes this is exactly what I am interested in - housing, town planning.

N: You were already at Stanley Buildings?

R: Yes, and I knew that they related to Stanley Buildings and the future of Stanley Buildings, and I was secretary of the tenants' association, and I thought, yeah, this will coincide with everything that I liked, and my interests as well. And, actually Stanley Buildings was born out of a squatting situation anyway.

N: When?

R: In 1974.

N: What do you mean squatting situation?

R: A squatting group took over the building.

N: Who was living there before?

R: No one, it was derelict. These [Ray and I are talking in his kitchen on a second floor flat in block 11-20, Stanley Buildings] were derelict slums, boarded up by British Rail.

N: Ah, I see, until the 70s.

R: Yeah, they said to the council, 'we want to set ourselves as a co-op, decorate and do them up ourselves...and would you give us short-life leases,' and they said, 'yeah', the GLC was great then.

N: This was GLC, not Camden?

R: No, GLC facilitated it, Camden signed it.

N: Are there people who have been here since 1974?
R: Yeah. So, I was interested in squats, co-ops, it is all about self-determining communities which goes with my political stance.

N: Which is?

R: Anarcho-syndicalist.

N: Influences from Kropotkin.

R: Yeah, stuff like that.

[So, KXRLG] like the idea of me, because they knew I was going to be a housing professional, and they hadn't had one on the committee and [they wanted] initiatives for pre-fabricated housing, semi-permanent housing.

N: Do you want it?

R: I think the Railway Lands should have housing on it.

N: Pre-fabricated and semi-permanent?

R: No, I mean for interim uses.

N: Why is social housing important on the Railway Lands?

R: Because it is the largest inner city development in London and there is such a housing push here, so much homelessness, and so many people want to live in central London.

Nityanand: What were the Clash doing in Somers Town?

Una: Just drinking at our local [pub]. You wouldn't believe it, would you, in 1984, the Cock Tavern was a trendy place. Now it is full of people drinking vodka over a weekend. But, yeah, you know, you had lots of young people, lots of bands, lots of artists, designers.

N: When did it become squatter land?


N: Was that when you were there? You were in a band, going to college?

U: No, I came down on holiday, and somebody said there was an empty flat, and in Scotland, the letting rules were different.

N: What, from Glasgow?

U: Edinburgh. There weren't the same squatting laws whereas in London it was much easier at that time...If there was an empty flat and you could get in without getting caught by the police, that was all you needed to do. Once you changed the lock it was yours.

N: Until you got evicted.

U: Whoever owned the property could take you to court and get an eviction notice.

N: You weren't breaking any laws?

U: You would probably now, I think. Yeah, it was illegal to break in and enter,
but it wasn’t illegal to squat in an empty property.

N: So, what were you doing at that point?

U: Um, I think after I had been here a year, I went back to college. Took a degree in politics. Worked in a bar... It is a very stressful way to live, because you don’t know how long you have your flat.

N: Did you have to keep moving around?

U: I think I moved about four times in three years...I think we were a lot more creative. If you know the flat that was going to be demolished, you -

N: Spruce it up.

U: Yeah, it is not like, 'this is my home for the next 20 years, will this be a good investment?' It was more like a lifestyle, which I wouldn’t want now, but it was good.

N: All of Somers Town?

U: No, bits of it. You know the Ossulston Estate was being renovated block by block and as one block became empty you could just move in. Everybody moved in the bit of Levita [House] that was being cleared by the Council. ‘Til they got the last tenant out, the Council couldn’t do it up. If the flats were empty, squatters would move in.

N: So gradually the council decided that they wanted to do up the places?

U: Well, once they had the funding they would leave the squatters in until they were ready to do up the block. And then they would try to get them out again. In fact, it is a good way of looking after your property, it’s cheaper than private security guards who watch 99 empty flats and you’ve got one old-aged pensioner who won’t move out.

N: But the old-aged pensioner wasn’t a squatter.

U: No, but that’s OK. If you have got one council tenant left and you’ve got 99 empty flats and a block that it is waiting to be renovated, it is actually often easier to have squatters in than to have security guards controlling it at night... So, the squatters created this kind of vibrant pocket in the area. I think it was vibrant, more than it was now. I spent a lot of money in the local pubs. Lot of money in the local supermarket.

N: Do you think [squatting] was word of mouth?

U: It’s just a movement, you know what I mean?... If you are into rave culture, you know where to go. If you are involved in housing politics, you know what is going on, or,

N: So, how did you know, from Edinburgh?

U: Because I met some people when I came down from Edinburgh to stay with them, they were living in blocks that were squatted on, and if you lived in one big block in the 80s you knew subcultures.

N: Then, gradually after ’87...
U: Yeah, I got re-housed in 87.

N: What happened to [the squatters]?

U: Some of them went traveling. Some of them got re-housed. Some of them went back to where they had come from, like Scotland. People just moved on. Some of them moved on to short-life housing, some into housing associations, thing people on low incomes do. I don't know anyone who bought their own house.

N: So then, you started to get involved with [King's Cross] Railway Lands Group.

U: The Railway Lands Group wasn't set up, but there was Inquire, which was the local advice center. And I remember my friend the courier, I remember us going in to ask about it, but they were very suspicious of us because we had been squatters. They tended to work with tenants, not squatters. And also, you know, it was very hush hush at that point, but eventually they had a public meeting, and a working group going, and that was the predecessor, I can't remember...They held the meeting at Theatro Technis.

N: Oh, that meeting and there were hundreds of people.

U: Yeah, and they used Inquire as a base, because there was a worker there who would service the group and support it, you know, and then eventually the group moved, I don't know when the group moved in here [Instrument House, King's Cross Road, present premises of KXRLG].

N: Why were you so interested?

U: I suppose it was because it was about politics, about justice and inequality...that's why the Nineties are different. The Eighties were different, there was a lot more struggle going on between the Tory government and the country. It was a different mood, it was much more confrontational, more us and them. Now, it's New Labour and more oblique now.

N: So, basically political issues drew you to the group?

U: Yeah.

N: But, then you got more and more involved, you chaired [KXRLG] twice.

U: Once, but for two years. Yeah, it's a political education. As you get more involved, you get more confident, you think well I could do this, you know, you learn.... You learn about structures and systems and local government and the community sector which I think is useful.

N: Then, how would you evaluate it, and?

U: It's a big question, isn't it? I think it is wearying. You go to meetings, you spend hundreds of hours going to meetings, and what do you get out of it? My rent has doubled ... things have got worse. The advice center's been shut, the library's been shut, the Shaw Theatre's been shut.

N: Did local people go to the Shaw?
U: Mostly not, mostly it was, you know. Guardian readers like myself. They used the library; they didn’t go to the theatre so much.

N: What does the [new] British Library mean to people?

U: That’s interesting. I think it’s elitist, I think it’s traditional. I think it’s conservative.

N: The library or the architecture of the building?

U: The whole thing. I think culture is important but if you can’t house your people...

Ray and Una richly describe an everyday life shaped by squatting in an economically stagnant, but culturally rich King’s Cross. The images they convey are ostensibly memories of a period of politicization and activism when they could fashion themselves an oppositional subjectivity against Thatcherite conservatism. For two young people from small, regional cities, squatting in King’s Cross provided an intensely intimate exposure to London, with its inequities of living conditions, land ownership, and access to resources. Their words have an occasional hardness and lack sentimentality, suggesting beleagueredness rather than bitterness. For both, housing was and remains the chief terrain of struggle, the key variable defining their access to the city and their urban identity. After years as squatters, and thus technically homeless, they have secured public housing in King’s Cross, although Ray’s is short-life, i.e., he has to renew his lease is every six months.

Ray and Una share a class position that resembles that of Cyril and Shirley, one that has been crucial to the articulation of the community planning practices of KXRLG. However, they are very critical of Tony Blair’s New Labour government and the loss of oppositionality vis-à-vis the market that it symbolizes. Una conveys it best when she
responds to my asking whether she would have cared about the Railway Lands had she lived in south London. She said, provocatively: "Well, I would in theory, because I'm always interested in old areas that are not being kept, and that are being turned into Blair's British Disneyland PLC." The combination of marketing, tourism, the idealization and hence privatization of place that Disneyland stages is still very far from the likely effects of urban regeneration at King's Cross (Zukin 1995: 54, 64). However, as I discuss in Chapter Six, the rhetoric of the King's Cross Partnership draws heavily on the current fashion for cultural and entertainment districts as solutions to troubled inner city economies, a new urbanism that relies on the very combination that Disney so effortlessly exploits.

The squatter movement, at least for a non-upwardly mobile section of the relatively young in the 1980s, mobilized an aesthetic – a style of inhabiting and imagining derelict space – that was linked to a half-anarchist, half-socialist politics. Their oppositional spatial politics attracted them to the KXRLG's community regeneration philosophy and its former insurgent planning strategies. Without doubt, the KXRLG's community planning work has strengthened the activist fabric of King's Cross. Yet, whether its style of insurgent urban planning can be sustained in the more consensualist New Labour era at the turn of the twenty-first century is doubtful. Sociologist Bob Jessop (1998), for example, argues that "a new economic consensus has emerged at [the] local and regional level" in the wake of "the defeat of left-wing 'municipal socialist' strategies" by Thatcherism. It, he elaborates:
emphasises cities' need to promote economic and extra-economic conditions for sustainable endogenous development; and/or to market themselves as being 'business-friendly' as well as committed to working with the private sector. In both regards there is a strong emphasis on the role of partnerships (operating on various levels of social organisation, in and across different functional domains, and on different spatial scales) (77).

Arguably the central government flagship of this consensus is the formation of the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) formed in 1994 by pooling central government resources for certain training, education, and housing and environmental improvement programs targeted for deployment in disadvantaged areas across the country. Successful bidders for these public funds have to show that they would manage programs within a multi-sector "partnership" model, favored by the then Tory government and continued by New Labour (Jessop 1998). The partnership model fits an explicitly entrepreneurial urban redevelopment strategy and in Britain tends to be composed of "lead partners" such as the mayor and the regeneration officer from the local council(s), executives from prominent local businesses, TECs (Training and Enterprise Councils), and local community organizations.

KXRLG participated in forming a bid for an SRB at King's Cross. However, the appointed board of the King's Cross Partnership, unlike Cityside Regeneration in Spitalfields, which I discuss in the subsequent chapter, did not include any community development organizations. Instead, it remains made up of bankers and business executives from the property companies and the CTRL contractors, two councillors each from Camden and Islington, a representative from the local police division, and four 'elected community representatives.'
The King’s Cross Partnership won £37.5 million of public funds, which is being matched with some £250 million from private-sector sources. Hence, it is one of the richest SRBs in Britain. The area it is supposed to serve includes the Railway Lands, most of the Somers Town neighborhood to the west of St Pancras station, the Thornhill neighbourhood to the east in Islington, and a triangle south of the stations but north of the Bloomsbury quarter. All of these areas have high unemployment, poor housing and health, higher school dropout rates for youth, and considerable minority populations. Tellingly, the area has no small business association. There are, however, notable community social service organizations, including Bangladeshi versions, the prominent minority group of color at King’s Cross. Yet, many of these groups don’t collaborate, as I jarringly found out while helping KXRLG’s former co-ordinator, Gary Hewett, launch a coalitional investigation concerning the barriers Bangladeshi groups at King’s Cross faced in accessing King’s Cross Partnership’s programs.

The lack of strong networks between community groups mirrors the physical divisions of the area: the north-south borough boundary at York Way, the west-east artery of the Euston Road, and the monumental stations. Against this is the general, long-existing reputation of King’s Cross as a red-light district riddled with crime, drugs, and homelessness. Railway quarters are socially messy zones of travelers, commuters, and the homeless. However, the principal thrust of King’s Cross Partnership’s regeneration platform is an effort in what Stoker and Mossberger (1994) and more broadly Painter (1998: 264-65) identify as symbolic rather than community development. It wants to attract businesses and visitors to the area, and make the area more amenable to the predominantly upmarket users of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link whose first steps in
London would be at King’s Cross. To this end, it bandies about notions of sense of place and ‘designing out’ crime and making King’s Cross a new urban quarter. Yet, it does this with a distinctively arrogant manner, such that virtually all community groups have been discouraged, except the handpicked community appointees to the Board.

During this time, roughly late 1995 to early 1998, the KXRLG benefited from this antagonism, frequently voiced in the group’s newsletter, *Carrion*. As the only umbrella organization concerned with planning and development in the area, its past work was an important resource for the Partnership. For example, the group was invited to participate in the discussing the Site Implementation Study, along with the various fora the Partnership had set up on social and community, economic, and design issues, respectively. The Site Implementation Study (SIS) tried to assemble a blueprint on which to regenerate the Railway Lands (BDP Planning 1997). It discussed transport issues, the oligarchic property structure and current land uses in the area, historic nature of the industrial railway landscape, the logistics of the CTRL, as well as the vagaries of London’s economy, in order to lay out and assess a variety of regeneration themes for the area.

These included what the KXRLG like to call ‘big-hit’ themes, where regeneration is led by a major economic or cultural use, such as a convention centre or a football stadium, as well as one which emphasizes community uses, favored by KXRLG, and based on Camden Council’s Community Planning Brief (1994). Although the group was invited to participate in the first SIS consultation, they were closed out from the others, and the consultant report was written without the benefit of KXRLG’s past insight into organizing and managing a more equitable use of the Railway Lands. In this sense, the
SIS consultation symbolizes the first major eclipsing of the KXR LG in being the lead innovator in shaping community development initiatives.

That eclipsing would hasten after the firing of the chief executive, Lesley Chalmers, at the end of 1997, and a more concerted effort on the part of the Partnership to better play the “community card.” By this, I mean the Partnership provided a sense of inclusion and ownership through giving funding to community groups and social service and educational programs. Yet, by doing this, it felt that it was “supporting” community development enough without actually having to surrender decision-making power. Most of the various fora at which members of community groups could attend were consultative. Voting never took place as decisions continue to be made at the Board level.

Moreover, there has been widespread anger that resources - some £11.5 million in the first two years -- were being frittered away on expensive surveillance cameras for King’s Cross station and a circus of consultants. This has gradually changed, so that community groups now see King’s Cross Partnership as something like a cash-cow, giving milk to a cash-stripped community and voluntary sector. These groups compete against each other for what is actually a small percentage of King’s Cross Partnership’s resources. For the Partnership, supporting the community means small grants to an Indian dance company, needle exchange programs, central heating improvements and flower beds for council tenants, or a neon sign for an art gallery.

In fact, I found that public consultation is often an exercise in not listening. On behalf of KXR LG, I attended meetings over streetscape improvements in Churchway and Doric Way, a very graffitied and very Bangladeshi section of Somers Town. There were
two sets of consultations, a bilingual Bengali-English one for the Bengalis and a English one for everyone else. My group involved a dozen or so young Bangladeshi women, a Bangladeshi translator, the project director from Camden’s planning department, local ward councillor Sybil Shine and me. After two or three meetings, we ‘agreed’ on “conservation quality” York stone paving for a marked-up, poorly lit alleyway, and a single bench in a potential “pocket park” so as not to encourage youth/gang congregation. The project director repeatedly told the women, via the translator, that none of the £165,000 (approximately $264,000) was for safety improvements that were priorities for them.

This vignette illustrates the lack of adequate “interpersonal, interorganisational, and institutional embeddedness” that is necessary for a successful partnership approach to regeneration (Jessop 88). Instead, the King’s Cross Partnership would rather employ retail consultants to estimate the prospects for a revitalized shopping district in Chalton Street, the heart of Somers Town, or having a street market as an “interim use” in Weller’s Court, between King’s Cross station and the Great Northern Hotel. KXRLG had spent more than a year studying and campaigning for adopting such uses as an effective strategy for the ‘meanwhile.’ The King’s Cross Partnership appropriated the vehicle without so much as acknowledgement or an invitation to plan collaboratively. That the KXRLG could muster no anger and described the proposals in their November 1998 issue of the Carrion without a shred of irony confirms the relative ease and finesse by which the King’s Cross Partnership has seized a monopoly in regenerating Britain’s largest redevelopment site.
I had begun the chapter with *High Hopes* and the figuration of the disenfranchised and displaced working class agent, and later linked it more generally with the activists at KXRLG. I have tried to show that despite the ongoing disempowerment, paralleling the decline of manufacturing and the rise of an economy dominated by financial and other business services, the identification and sense of belonging to the traditional working class has been transformed at King's Cross into an insurgent practice of community planning.

Although this activism could withstand the legacies of Thatcherism, it is doubtful whether KXRLG will be able to weather the New Labour regime without reimagining itself, something which it is experiencing difficulty in doing. Paradigmatic of this is the public-private regeneration partnership that, as I have only hinted at here but will fully discuss in the last chapter, seeks to transform King’s Cross from a derelict, industrial district into London’s ‘newest cultural quarter.’

The notion of the cultural quarter, pushed by the Blair government to revitalize the nation and the inner city both ideologically and economically, strives to take advantage of the strong economic performance that emerging and established cultural industries are presently enjoying. This push will require the KXRLG to re-strategize in order to transform their community planning activism into a community-based, but entrepreneurial organization that manages and develops local assets for local people, such as the group’s collective dream, the community development trust model. However, at the end of 1998 — and from what I can tell from their newsletters that I still continue to receive — the management committee of the group resists such refiguration. In order to see what the trust model looks like in practice, and how it transforms the rhetoric of
community development, the potential of urbanist agency, and the future of the inner city.

I move southeast to Spitalfields, east of London’s financial district.

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1 The immensely popular Bagley’s had its share of local opponents, who have complained for years about noise and violence, for which there is sufficient evidence, including two murders and a number of grievous assaults. A case near the end of 1998, involving the beating of a club-goer by Bagley’s bouncers raised enough attention to persuade Camden councillors on the Licensing Committee to turn down Bagley’s license renewal application.

2 The original passenger station where travelers arrived, however, was a temporary structure in what was the potato market, about a third of a mile north of Euston Road.

3 The integrity of St Pancras is threatened by the current plans, since late 1993, to serve as the international terminus for the CTRL. This would involve increasing the number of platforms and re-siting the King’s Cross Thameslink station, part of a well-subscribed north-south commuter train service underneath St Pancras. These works entail the demolition and then rebuilding of the west flank of the station, a process for which there is little if no preservation control stipulated in the legislation that approved the CTRL coming in to St Pancras, the 1996 CTRL Act.

4 Julian Bircher, interview, fall 1998. Bircher lives in Stanley Buildings and works as a media representative for the tenants, charging fees to film and television companies who shoot in the area. He is also an avid local historian, and told me about the history of the gasworks and the former Bessemer steel factory in the King’s Cross area. According to him, the gasworkers’ cottages were one of the first dwellings built in steel. He was able to finally persuade the Twentieth Century Society, the society concerned with safeguarding and promoting this century’s architecture and design, to write to the Minister of Culture about the worthiness of the cottages for historically designation.

5 The quote is from Meyer (1907) cited in Walter Benjamin, vol. V, p. 222 in his Das Passagen-Werke, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (1982). Buck-Morss cites this as (F4, 5), according to Benjamin’s filing system, the Konvolut, which she details on pp. 50-52. Das Passagen-Werke is part of Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften, 6 vols., eds. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, with the collaboration of Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972).

6 From an interview with Robert Thorne, 1998. See Hunter and Thorne, ed., 1990; for King’s Cross’s industrial archaeology see Duckworth and Jones 1988; for investigations into its architectural and social history, see King’s Cross Conservation Areas Advisory Committee 1989.

7 Spot listing involves putting pressure on the Minister responsible for historic buildings to immediately designate or upgrade a designation of a building of ‘special historic or architectural interest.’

8 St Pancras files; Victorian Society archives.
Conservationist Andrew Saint, while working for English Heritage, researched the architectural history of the Ossulston Estate, built by the London County Council in the 1930s and 40s. For Saint, the Ossulston Estate, especially its key block, Levita House, was the most important example of social housing that was built during the inter-war period. His recommendations for listing, made to English Heritage in 1990, did not come into effect until 1997.

Alan Baxter & Associates is an architectural and structural engineering firm that have been heavily involved in the King’s Cross CTRL debate, producing nine reports for a variety of clients, including the London Borough of Camden, KXRLG, English Heritage, as well as acting on their own. In 1991, for example, they proposed a less destructive design for the King’s Cross CTRL terminus. They have acted as consultants regarding the impact of King’s Cross redevelopment on the area’s listed buildings for Camden, and in 1994, studied the first proposals of St Pancras as an international station for the KXRLG. Currently, they are part of the design team converting St Pancras station into the international CTRL terminus, including returning the working on the plans to convert the St Pancras Chambers into a luxury hotel, its original use.

This hasn’t stopped Ray from pursuing a part-time acting career, for which King’s Cross has proven to be a convenient base.

The allusion of the dust heap is apropos here; St Chad’s Street, across King’s Cross station, was the site of the dust heap notoriously described in Charles Dickens’ *Our Mutual Friend*.
CHAPTER FOUR

CAPITAL FLOWS, COBBLESTONES AND CURRY HOUSES:
BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH PROPERTY AT SPITALFIELDS

(Image 16) The pinstriped set walking towards
Spitalfields Market along Brushfield Street, along the Balfour-Beatty tower
under construction. The white spire of Christ Church is in the background. Fall
1998.

Fredrik suggested that Spitalfields was, currently, a battleground of some interest; zone
of ‘disappearances’, mysteries, conflicts, and ‘baroque realism’...we had to get on. If
we didn’t move fast, any halfway-sharp surrealist could blunder in and pick up the
whole pot.

‘Spitalfields’: the consiglieri liked the sound of it, the authentic whiff of heritage,
Drifting like cordite from the razed ghetto. But, please, do not call it ‘Whitechapel’, or
whisper the dreaded ‘Tower Hamlets’. Spitalfields meant Architecture, the Prince,
Development Schemes: it meant gay vicars swishing incense, and charity-ward
crusaders finding the peons to refill the poor benches, and submit to total-immersion
baptism. It meant Property Sharks, and New Georgians promoting wallpaper
catalogues. It meant video cams tracking remorselessly over interior detail, and out,
over lampholders, finials, doorcases, motifs, cast-iron balconies; fruity post-synch,
lashings of Purcell. And bulldozers, noise, dust; snarling angry machines. Ball-and-
chain demolitions. Sold! There’s nothing the cutting-room boys like as much as a good
ball-and-chain: especially with some hair-gelled nobby in a pin-stripe suit at the
controls. Skin-deep Aztec fantasies of glass and steel lifting in a self-reflecting glitter
of irony from the ruins. Spitalfields was this week’s buzz-word. And Spitalfields
meant lunches.

Iain Sinclair, Downriver 1995 [1991]: 93
It is in the changing relationship between the "central" and "inner" city that the cultural and spatial effects of the service-driven economy can be felt and seen. In the matrix of managing the effects of de-industrialization and the erosion of a manufacturing-led economic base historic conservation has often played a noticeable role. To many urban analysts, historic conservation remains an ally to gentrification, which disrupts working class everyday lives and spaces that had developed on the fringes of the central city. Within this framework, the intensification of conservation’s tendency to aestheticize place, in the very gesture of saving it for posterity, is opposed to the erosion, even disappearance of "community."

In London, it is Spitalfields, E1 that both exemplifies this scenario and transgresses it. That is, within the context of historic conservation in Spitalfields, and the attendant fears of gentrification and the "aestheticization of everyday life" (Featherstone 1991), it is a notion of community that has been mobilized. Yet, as I show here, the advocates of conservation and community development, as influential non-profit entities focusing on "property-led" regeneration strategies, find common ground.

Sharon Zukin, in writing about the production and consumption of space in the contemporary American city, notes of the development of the non-profit sector alongside the expansion of financial services (1995: viii). In Britain, within the practices of urban regeneration that have solidified since the late 1980s, and which micro-manage the spatial and social effects of the country’s post-industrial economy, non-profit activities operate between the public and private sectors. As such, they fill a gap between the public and private as they
open new terrain from which community interests can be articulated, against those of government and big business ones.

As non-profit organizations, their activities include a variety of initiatives supported by local people who volunteer time to address a problem pertaining to health, housing, education, leisure, or the environment. Many of the activists and participants in these initiatives hold strong opinions on the nature of community development. However, few actively engage in the physical building of the environment in which any set or group calling itself the community must share. It is this “structuring of space” (Zukin 1991: 268) that I pay attention to in this chapter.

(Image 17) Bishopsgate: One of the ancient, increasingly seamless boundaries separating the City from the East End. At the left is Bishopsgate Arcade, where high-end retail and commercial uses are incorporated into the reworked (1988) façade of Liverpool Street Station.

On the eastern boundary of the City, the financial district of Britain, if not Europe, Spitalfields has resisted being swallowed up, maintaining an everyday landscape and resident population notable for its diversity.

Undoubtedly, this is a result of a long-standing antagonism between the social
and economic histories between the City and Spitalfields that persists. The City, for centuries run by a non-democratic Corporation of London, has separated itself from the wards around it, especially the East End, for which Spitalfields serves as a gateway.

The City of London historically developed as a manufacturing and trading center. Nevertheless, from the late sixteenth century, with the establishment of such trading enterprises as “the Levant Company in (1581), the East India Company (1600), the Virginia Company (1606) and various African and American ventures,” the City was emerging as a financial capital (Porter 1994: 48). With this increasing specialization, the messier industries, and the laborers and small tradespeople, many of them immigrants, who fuelled London’s engine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were squeezed outside the City walls to the south and east (for descriptions, see Porter: 48-49, 92, 97-99, 140-143, 221-222). Throughout the development of capitalism, within the rise and fall of British industrial prominence, and with the cultural transformations that have accompanied London’s changing economic fortunes, Spitalfields has remained an intensified zone of urban change.

We can look at this intensification at a number of levels. We can follow the readings of Spitalfields’ social history as chapters in the books of contemporary chroniclers of inner city London, Iain Sinclair (1995) and Patrick Wright (1991). For Sinclair, as we detect in the opening passage, conservationists are objects of a flâneuriste social critique, dissected for their simultaneous attempt to retrieve and arrest the occult histories inscribed in
everyday East London spaces (see also 97, 134-150). For Wright, the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust's attempt to save "Georgian Spitalfields" is where the class (and racial) biases of the nation's heritage, an important legacy of the Thatcher years, and the related aesthetic politics of conservation, face an impasse in the inner city (see chapter 8, "Rodinsky's Place" 97-119).

We could juxtapose these with the vignettes of Raphael Samuel, the late social historian. Samuel lived in Spitalfields, on Elder Street, since the early 60s (Samuel 1989). Samuel, himself an early supporter of the Trust, critiques its role in producing a historically frozen "Georgian Spitalfields," fetishizing a landscape that had medieval streets as well as Victorian shopfront additions, and where Spitalfields Market traders, petty capitalists, labourers in small industries and garment workers lived and worked (see pp. 137, 139, 142, 145-148). In addition, we could link Samuel's history with cultural geographer Jane M Jacobs's (1996) attention to the spatial effects of diasporic populations in post-imperial Britain, to which Spitalfields, as the heart of London's Bangladeshi community, and itself at the City's fringe, so strongly attests. Through the prism of postcolonial theory, Jacobs finds in historic conservation and its Spitalfields practitioners the racialization of space via heritage. Consequently, what is fascinating about these recent accounts about Spitalfields is that they all derive some of their evocative and critical power by recognizing that historic conservation has become a distinctive cultural and spatial politics actively shaping the landscape.
Since conservation has been and continues to be paramount to the ways in which space is structured in Spitalfields, I will begin with the activities of the Trust, read against insights from my interview with its current director, Andrew Byrne. I continue my development of a theory of conservation as an aesthetic politics organized within current practices of urbanism, which I explored in Chapter Two. Using the Trust as an example, I show how conservation produces spaces in which a notion of community circulates. Moreover, I argue that property is the chief vehicle in which a notion of "community" is generated in Spitalfields. In order to elaborate this theme beyond the purview of conservation, with its attendant aestheticization and gentrification, I examine the increasingly prominent Spitalfields Small Business Association (SSBA). Organized as a trust with a separate trading arm, I argue that the SSBA, despite its divergent ethos and goals, shares a focus on property with the Trust.

THE SPITALFIELDS HISTORIC BUILDINGS TRUST

Spitalfields first achieved major media attention as a result of a group of conservationists who occupied a derelict Georgian house on Elder Street, in north-west Spitalfields, in 1977. The conservationists, a largely male group that included a number of then young now prominent social and architectural historians, were protesting the actions of British Land, a large property company that had already demolished a number of properties on the street. Their action forced British Land to enter into a set of discussions on the fate of the remaining properties. At that time in the early 1970s the properties themselves were, by
today's estimation, undervalued. Through tapping networks of friends and colleagues, the conservationists generated enough interest to obtain a private donation which could be used to buy the derelict house from British Land, and save the Georgian house.

(Image 18) Elder Street in the fall of 1998

Spitalfields had already lost a significant portion of its early eighteenth century houses, along with a number of narrow streets. Many of the remaining houses were roomy; some of the houses had weavers’ attics, residues of Huguenot settlement and work in the silk industry. By the 1970s, Bangladeshi migrants working in the leather trade had seen the usefulness of these houses, however derelict, as sweatshops on the bottom, and living spaces on the top.

The Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust was formed to save these houses from being demolished, and to ensure their restoration and conservation as "Georgian houses." Raphael Samuel describes the conservation trustees as "recruited by and large, from a rather patrician, if relatively impecunious, segment of the English middle class…instinctively hostile to the developers" (1989: 167) who were already pushing in from the City. In addition to doing engineering, architectural, and historical surveys of the houses, the Trust
employed a combination of tactics to ensure that no more Georgian houses were lost. These ranged from outright occupation of other derelict houses and lobbying the local council, Tower Hamlets, to strengthen existing conservation areas and proposing new ones, to finding interested home buyers willing to restore and maintain a Georgian period house.

The Trust raised money through a combination of architectural heritage and conservation grants, as well as the surplus gained in the acquisition and selling of derelict properties. Houses were sold with covenants, specifying how they were to be maintained as single family homes, their original use. The process was cumulative, so that by the time of my interview, in March 1998, the Trust had conserved some 25 to 30 houses. The success of the Trust’s strategy resulted in the discovery of a niche property market for historic properties, which encouraged commercial real estate agents to get into the restoration game.

Explaining how the Trust operates, its director for the last 6 years, Andrew, explains:

Andrew: I think we are slightly different than other trusts. We have done a lot of buildings, more than one building, where they have only done one. They might set themselves up to do a building, they take ten years to do it, and they might carry on, and may never do another building. Or they may do another one in another ten years. We have been very much hands on and done a lot of stuff, it has to be said. And we are very lucky to be in a fascinating area, in the inner city, and that really helped us because there has been stuff that we can target, and stuff we can do, low property values when we started - so we could buy stuff.

Nityanand: in the late Seventies.

A: late Seventies, and stuff was very cheap, because no one wanted to be here, but that didn’t affect us, we saw that we could buy these buildings and actually create a community and that obviously fed the property market.

N: How was community created? Was it based on networks people had?
A: We got - the early trustees were architectural historians, architects, journalists [N: oh I see] artists if you like. We were able to get people we knew, like-minded people, to buy these houses. We might buy this house and sell it to someone who would do it up properly, and make sure that the building was restored sympathetically, was put back as a house as it was originally.

Andrew illustrates how conservation in London functions as a cultural practice of a certain class fraction. As Andrew reveals, this is not only demarcated by occupational activity, but by being within a certain circuit of friends, acquaintances, and colleagues. This circuit, as Alan described in Chapter Two, can support an aesthetic politics that engages architecture and historic conservation. In Spitalfields, however, these practices aren’t limited to amicable discussion and decision-making at weekly meetings of the Victorian or Twentieth Century societies. Indeed, they affect the actual urban environment that is being preserved because the conservationists save a Georgian house by buying it, selling it, or living in it. Using the class-marked circuit of the conservation-minded, the Trust actively sought to attract new residents who would take the responsibility of painstakingly preserving houses in a manner which the Trust found agreeable (hence, restrictive covenants which would stipulate which railings must be kept, for example). Andrew is forthright in claiming that, in this way, the Trust developed the local housing market and created a community.

This community of conservation-minded home owners, in what remains one of London’s poorest wards, became so popular in their attempts to create an eighteenth century everyday life, that they were satirized in the New Georgian Handbook, written in 1985 by two insiders in the conservation world (Artley and Robinson 1985). Despite this eventual parody, the insurgency of the early years
was real, at a time when property on the fringe of central London was still affordable and when conservation was still a practice reaching public attention for saving the country house. Within that configuration, Spitalfields offered a new and unexplored context for a stylized and activist conservation in the inner city.

Despite its former unpopularity with middle and upper class Londoners, Spitalfields had provided opportunities for garment workers and fruit and vegetable market traders for two centuries. The streets and houses the Trust ‘discovered’ reflected a continuous history of use, from the Huguenots in the eighteenth century to the Jews in the later nineteenth to the migrant Bangladeshis carving themselves a growing niche in the rag trade from the 1950s. In his description of the richness of past and present everyday spaces in Spitalfields, and the social lives they had supported, Samuel notes that the Trust’s activities did consider the effects on the larger community. In its focus on restoring the Georgian house to a single family home, the Trust did try to find alternative premises for those dislocated from properties it had acquired (1987: 167). These were often Bangladeshis that had made sweatshops on the ground floors. Moreover, the Trust was not opposed to the local borough of Tower Hamlets’s building affordable housing in the district. Yet, Andrew admitted that because of the Trust’s active role in developing property for private occupation, relations with the councillors and officers of Tower Hamlets had its frosty moments. As he describes:

Andrew: The council just sees us doing houses for people with lots of money, but they don’t see the wider benefit, the fact that houses are being occupied so they [the council] can get council tax, businesses attracted to the history of the place, the convenience of the place, the council benefit
from that. They are keener on social housing, but there is room for everybody.

Nityanand: What would they want to see done with these houses?

A: I don't know.

N: Oh –

A: What they would like us to do is to spend £200.000 to restore a house and sell it to a poor family for £20.000 or rent them out at subsidised rent.

Within Andrew’s response, one gets both the sense of the significance of conservation work in revitalizing Spitalfields, and its limits in terms of meeting needs for other residents. Andrew is right to note that conservation has made living and doing business in Spitalfields fashionable. Yet, hidden within his last retort to my question is the sting of being accused of gentrification, of putting buildings before people that the Trust has had to deal with over its twenty-year existence. Moreover, it is not only the local government that finds them somewhat objectionable. In her reading of the battles over the urban redevelopment in Spitalfields, Jacobs juxtaposes the conservationists as white, largely affluent “homesteaders” against a growing Bangladeshi migrant community which had made Brick Lane, one of Spitalfields’ two north-south arteries (itself an ancient Roman road), its center.

The descriptions that Jacobs gives the Trust accord with that of its director and Samuel to a surprising degree. She writes that the trust “combined a form of guerrilla activism with business acumen.” (76). She confirms Andrew’s frank admission of using word of mouth to advertise the Trust’s properties, telling us about the Trust’s newsletter, which informed its readers “about who moved in and their ‘credentials,’ either as committed
conservationists, sympathetic architects or adequately avant-garde artists and writers” (80). Jacobs continues, writing that despite being labeled gentrifiers by “the local Left and various non-statutory voluntary sector organizations operating in the area” (80), the significance of the Trust’s politics was not whether Bangladeshis and their garment workshops were displaced in order to resuscitate Georgian Spitalfields. Rather it was the way the Trust participated in the racialization of Spitalfields as a place, and by extension, Britain as a nation:

What is important in this history of genteeel gentrification is the way in which an immediate encounter with Bengali Britons generated not an overt ‘geography of rejection’ (Sibley 1984: 410) but what might be better described as a managed multicultural cohabitation. The Trust’s aspirations for Spitalfields always engaged with the history of migration that characterised the area: the Huguenot, Jewish, Irish and now Bengali settlements… Its notion of a ‘balanced community’ was based upon a multiculturalism of convenience that provided a place (a discrete space) for Bengalis so that there might be more room for the elaboration of English heritage (86-87).

Jacobs importantly goes beyond conservation’s ostensible class markings to ask how it mobilizes, in the name of salvaging architectural heritage, notions of place and, I would add, everyday life, which in the increasing multicultural streets of London, appear racialist or race-motivated. This is in part a result of the lack of social or cultural history as criteria for historical designation. Of course, there are exceptions where architectural merit joins local social history. For example, the former synagogue that since 1976 has housed the London Jamni Mosque (below), at Fournier Street and Brick Lane, is listed.
The Trust’s offices in Princelet Street, in a Georgian house which includes a synagogue in its back rooms, recently received an upgraded listing from Grade II to the rare Grade II*. Nonetheless, the principal criterion for designation remains exceptional architectural integrity that is of historical interest.

However, the lasting significance of the Trust in Spitalfields can be attributed to property development, which encouraged a community of the locally-residing conservation minded to flourish, a population which hadn’t really existed before. Nonetheless, the Trust’s focus on houses resulted in price inflation and market saturation that displaced not only Bangladeshi workshops but also eventually the Trust itself. Andrew gives a sense of this evolution, within the context of Spitalfields as a whole:

Nityanand: How do you raise funds to support buying?

Andrew: We have reached a stage so that we can hopefully support ourselves; we can get loans to restore but we didn’t need loans to buy them, so we have built up some reserves in 21 years.
N: Do you still own anything in Spitalfields?

A: Other than this here [the Trust’s offices at 19 Princelet Street], nothing in Spitalfields.

N: How many have you bought and sold?

A: We have owned about 40 buildings in our 20 years and a couple of building sites, which passed through our hands which we didn’t develop and we did one side of a street on a row that was demolished. We bought a school, from the council 7 years ago. Kids had set fire to it, the floors collapsed, and it became a dangerous structure, which they didn’t want. so we bought it from them. we did the floors. we wanted it to be artist studios, but we had to be commercial - the only way was flats.

N: How have the objectives of the trust changed over the years?

A: We’ve adjusted I’m sure. It is interesting. Raphael says that we have created a property market and since then maybe destroyed it for ourselves. We can’t buy ourselves.

N: How is this area, how would you describe it the people who live here now?

A: It depends if you say the conservation area with the historic streets or the wider area.

N: How much of Spitalfields is a conservation area?

A: A few streets really –

N: That’s it?!

A: There are few streets - one is an industrial area down Petticoat Lane, it’s a marginal, I’m not sure whether it should be one, but it is, there are some good solid chunky Victorian buildings, probably not many listed, but they serve a purpose. The Artillery Lane Conservation Area - fairly small all round Artillery Lane and Passage. Fournier Street Conservation Area - Fashion Street. Fournier Street which we are in here, Princelet Street, Hanbury Street, Wilkes Street, bit of Brick Lane and onto Commercial Street takes in Christ Church. And Elder Street Conservation Area, on the north side of the market takes in Folgate Street.
Andrew: Then you have the wider parish - its new build, 1930s housing estates, 1960s housing estates, and that is the whole community, there is retail, residential, factories, shops, restaurants, and that’s maybe really how a city should be. Suburbia is dead because there is just housing and people travelling to London, so they are only there in the evenings. Brick Lane is a lively street till 2 or 3 in the morning. There are 24-hour bagel shops on the top of Brick Lane.

Andrew admits that the Trust itself, in the name of conservation of Georgian Spitalfields, may have paid the ultimate price: to no longer be able to afford to participate in the district they shaped. This hasn’t meant the folding of the Trust. Instead, it has moved its sights further into the East End, in Stepney. It also has not meant a loss of interest in Spitalfields and its varied urban landscape. As Andrew shows, conservation can locate its aesthetic politics within the register of understanding how urban communities function and thrive. His comprehensive sense of Spitalfields as a community reflects a more nuanced approach to conservation in London, in Spitalfields and elsewhere.

The Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust began a process of revitalization in an inner city district in London, focused on the restoring and
conserving of houses surviving in a handful of streets that were built in the eighteenth century. It drew from a social network to not only help do the conservation work, but to generate a community which would share its conservationist ideals. In this way, the Trust created a community through property development, allowing a shared sense of aesthetics to impact the everyday life and urban landscape of Spitalfields. Against, however, the admittedly less glamorous and stylized life-ways of the Bangladeshi garment worker or entrepreneur, Jacobs argues, is the broaching of a racialized cultural politics of space.

Since I did not interview a pool of residents it is difficult to speculate on the intensity of this racialization. Certainly, the whiff of affluence that one catches on the spotless conserved Georgian houses of Elder, Princelet, Wilkes or Fournier Streets is jarring against the noise and bustle of Brick Lane. Although gentrified, they hardly seem reminiscent of Little England (or Wright’s (1985) ‘deep England,’ for that matter; see my discussion in Chapter Two). Importantly, they do announce an urban pastoral, as Samuel rightly argues, a domestication of the inner city and the messiness of its spaces (1989: 144; 1994: 329). However, they are one part of a larger Spitalfields that is undergoing transformation that was begun by conservationists but which now exceeds it.
SPITALFIELDS SMALL BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

Only two years after the Elder Street occupation, in 1979, a group of people got together with the express interest to form a housing co-operative. Intending to do something about the dereliction of housing then rampant in Spitalfields, the co-operative sought to receive refurbishment grants from the central government’s Housing Corporation. They were surprised to discover that although the Housing Corporation would give grants to renovate housing, they wouldn’t give any for properties which had both residential and working units, as did many of the derelict properties in Spitalfields. Trying another tactic, they got £15,000 from the former Greater London Council to fund a worker, and started a process which would they repeat around Spitalfields and out of which the Spitalfields Small Business Association (SSBA) was born. They began to renovate a derelict workspace, find a tenant, use the rent to separate it from the housing unit, renovate the housing unit, find a tenant, and so on.

Like the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust, the refurbishment of derelict property is the SSBA’s main object. However, while the Trust is a registered charity that focuses almost exclusively on restoring and selling Georgian houses, the SSBA is a community business which acts a renovator and manager of housing and workspace units which it leases to tenants. It provides business advice to its members, and more recently, has formed the SSBA Community Trust, to run two training projects. Kay, a community architect who has served as the director of SSBA since 1983, describes its elaborate structure:
Kay: Our work is in managed workspaces, so we’re a community developer. In fact, we are more than a community developer after we develop we manage so we are a community property company really. And so we raise money do up property then rent out, and the rental income has to cover the cost of the development and hopefully cover the cost of people who have to manage it. Now, if we can make profit here we can use that money to either get more property to develop or we can use it to support our business advice program. or bring out our newspaper or help one of our training programs. right -

... Now what we have recently done, all this used to be under the one umbrella of the SSBA. We aren’t a registered charity.

Nityanand: You’re not?

K: Because under British charity law, renting out small business premises is a straight business practice without any provisos like you can only stay there for three months because you are a new start or something like that. [It] is not a charitable act, so we therefore can’t get charitable status.

N: Because you rent out spaces.

K: Because the renting of small business premises for small business is not a charitable act, therefore because one of our activities is not charitable, the principal activity can’t be a charity. As far as our training programs are concerned, they can benefit from being a charity, it is easier to fundraise. So what we’ve done is split the organisation into two. So we set up SSBA Community Trust as a charity.

The evolution of the SSBA into a two-pronged organization concerned with community development in terms of one, local housing and workspace properties and two, providing skills training, was a twenty-year process. However, from its start, SSBA has been concerned with protecting the mixed-use properties that characterize Spitalfields. With only the £15,000 grant from the GLC as starting capital, they couldn’t buy property, so they had to develop a range of tactics. Jordan described how SSBA would campaign to get every public notice, such as dangerous structure notice and compulsory purchase orders placed on buildings to draw attention to the dereliction of the property
and to convince the owner or freeholder to grant them the main lease to do it up. If it was a housing unit, SSBA would get money from Housing Corporation, applying for it under the housing co-operative which has been maintained as a separate organization under the SSBA umbrella. In order to raise funds to do up the workshops, SSBA would grant a sublease to a tenant.

The timing of this approach was crucial and was open to backfire. In one instance, Kay explains how one freeholder:

tried to sell the freehold from under us, so we were very vulnerable and I managed to persuade Allen Sheppard from Grand Met to buy in as a friendly freeholder.

N: Grand Met?

K: Grand Met, a huge foods and drinks plc. He was on Business in the Community.

N: How did Business in the Community get involved?

K: He joined Business in the Community. I asked him, he said he would buy the freehold and he would give me time - so instead of taking five years [to do up the properties], I got seven.

That Sheppard proved to be less than friendly in later years to the ‘community’ illustrates the complex field in which an organization like SSBA had to negotiate in order to survive as a non-profit property concern. At the time, in the early 1980s, Sheppard saw Business in the Community as a way to get access to not only resources but networks. After all, it was headed up by HRH Prince Charles. Prince Charles’s office, through the Prince’s Trust, has been prominent on issues of architecture, conservation, urban design and regeneration. The Prince’s office funds an Institute of Architecture and the Built Environment, which is moving to Shoreditch, just north of Spitalfields,
itself an inner city area now also being reclaimed as a “cultural quarter.” In
terms of conservation, the Regeneration through Heritage program focuses on
renovating large industrial buildings largely in north England, and finding a
variety of retail, small business, and community uses. Much larger is the
Prince’s Youth Business Trust that provides start up money for young would-be
entrepreneurs.

In the 1980s Business in the Community was distinctive, in that it
served as a broker between large private companies and community
organizations wanting to be active in local regeneration. Kay now laments that
Business in the Community eventually embarked on their own community
regeneration projects, suggesting that too much leveraging of private interest
squashes local initiative. Nonetheless, the SSBA did benefit from the access
and opportunity Business in the Community provided, and it achieved
recognition when Prince Charles came to Spitalfields on his notorious visit to
the East End in 1987. That visit, the departure for Jacobs’ chapter on
Spitalfields, regeneration and community, is recalled by Kay:

Kay: You can imagine in the late Seventies-early Eighties, economic
regeneration was an unheard word. So nobody could quite get their heads
around what we were trying to do so we had to look at --when we took
over these properties, these are some of the former structures, [showing
me photographs] they’ll give you an idea. When Prince Charles came
down to the East End and declared something should be done he was on
our building site.

Nityanand: Oh right. Why was he here?

K: Just one of those things where I knew the guy who was working on
Business in the Community from the housing co-op work. He worked at
Business in the Community, yeah. Prince Charles had just become
president. Truman’s Brewery, which Allen Sheppard’s Grand Met had
just bought, had invited him down to the brewery. This friend of mind
asked could he bring this crowd of people to see our office, and we said sure, fine: he just wanted to show them the area. So I said yes, fine, then he rung up later, that the president would be coming. Well I didn’t know it was Prince Charles! [N: OH!]. Then when I discovered that it was Prince Charles, I said rather than bring him to our office, why can’t we take him to the workshops. I mean if he really wants to get to know what the East End is about.

Beyond the surprise visit, the Prince’s Business in the Community helped to launch a number of community initiatives. It brokered a £30,000 grant for the Spitalfields Community Development Group, “a local Bengali think-tank established by the male business sector in order to influence, but not halt, proposed development in Spitalfields” (Jacobs 98). The Spitalfields Community Development Group used that money to partially fund planning consultants to develop a Community Plan for the Truman Brewery/Bishopsgate Goodyard complex in north Spitalfields. One of these planners, interestingly enough, was Michael Parkes, who has been a planning consultant for the King’s Cross Railway Lands Group for a decade (see Parkes 1995).

The Bishopsgate Goodyard consisted of 17 acres and included a former railway station and its disused track, arches, tunnels, and goods yard. The Truman Brewery complex, made redundant by Grand Metropolitan plc’s acquisition and subsequent closure of it in February 1989, comprised of 10 acres. The western end of the Bishopsgate was earmarked for an office development, itself linked to relocating Shoreditch underground station (Parkes: 96). As a consequence of Business in the Community’s influential role in Spitalfields, the developers had agreed in writing to work with local people and to transfer the control of certain sections of the site to a Community
Development Trust. Spitalfields Community Development Group organized a
Working Party to co-ordinate the realization of this goal (98).

Undertaking research, technical advice and local consultation, Parkes
describes the major aims of their draft land use proposal to submit to the
architectural firm Hunt, Thompson. This included providing units of affordable
housing large enough to accommodate Bangladeshi migrant families, creating
employment opportunities, and providing affordable workspaces in the garment
and food industries. It also involved providing education, training and open
space as well as revitalizing Brick Lane in order to “create a focus of cultural
and commercial life which is attractive to visitors and which local people can
identify with and be proud of” (102).

Through further more extensive consultation, the Planning for Real
exercise was begun. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Planning for Real
offers local people a direct role in the planning process. It involves giving out
coloured cards illustrating various land uses and asking people to attach them to
buildings and spaces constructed on a large, three dimensional model of the
Bishopsgate and Brewery sites. Three meetings were held across Spitalfields,
and on display were the draft land use proposal, the model, as well as planning
briefs and drawings.

After ironing out differences between the draft and the Planning for Real
results, a Community Plan was submitted to the developers, Grand
Metropolitan and London and Edinburgh Trust. Both plans indicated some 350
housing units, and provided for workspaces, industrial units, community
facilities and a training centre; the Community Plan also included a mosque and
Islamic Centre. In April 1990, a deal was negotiated, then estimated worth some £25 million. This included transferring eight and half acres to a Community Development Trust at no cost on a 200 year lease, major contributions towards a training centre, a sports centre (over £1 million each), smaller contributions for a job centre and a nursery. In addition, an additional 2.7 acres would be available for a nominal rent if purchased at market value (Parkes 107, 108, 111).

All of this may sound too good to be true and it was. With the collapse of the property market in the early Nineties, the developers could not afford to go ahead with the project. This, along with central Government delays over approving the Underground extensions to Shoreditch, meant that the redevelopment of the Bishopsgate Goodsyard and Truman’s Brewery, as well as the community development trust, was dead in the water.

Nonetheless, participating in such a broad exercise in making change happen in the physical landscape, and controlling that change, gave Spitalfields’ residents and small businesses a sense of empowerment that it is arguably rare in inner-city communities. With the push given by Business in the Community, the Spitalfields Community Plan exercise introduced a level of confidence in community-generated strategies to deal with seemingly intractable problems of property, planning and regeneration that Spitalfields and other inner city areas face.

This was exactly what the Spitalfields Small Business Association was becoming about. At that time, during the late 80s, the SSBA was facing the challenges of an expanding business. As a property company interested in the
community it was improving, the SSBA became interested in providing training. It saw construction and joinery as mutually beneficial. It would be a useful skill for the local unemployed who would train on SSBA’s projects before finding jobs elsewhere. In addition, Kay found that joinery required skills of hand and eye co-ordination similar to those necessary for a machinist in the garment industry, as some of the trainees had been. She elaborates on the philosophy of the training and how it worked within the context of SSBA’s expansion:

Kay: [In 1987-88] we set up a training program. So for 12 months we had I think it was 12 people who were putting this building back together. They were sent on day release to college to do their courses, because this [the SSBA building project] was the practical, because I believe that class training has to have quality to it, it can’t be done in 12 weeks. So people went- people who want to be bricklayers, electricians, plumbers - all at different times and we were still putting this building back together [to be used] as a practical space. So after the first 12 months we set up the Crowngate Builders and Crown and Leek Joinery, two wholly owned subsidiaries of the SSBA. And took everybody in training on [i.e., as employees]. Yeah, everybody didn’t believe that I would do it when I set it up.

N: But that, how has that continued?

K: 10 years later we are down to 4 because of the recession in the building industry.

N: Really?

K: Yeah, we ran that for 12 months and then we ran a major contract on our workshops. I persuaded a funder - who actually took it for the lowest tendering price, and Crowngate took it for the lowest tendering price. What we did was we applied, instead of taking profit like a normal builder would, we applied so that we could run it longer, so all the lads had to work out how long it would have to run, what price they would pay themselves and all the rest of it.

N: Which workspace was this?
Looking from Spelman Street, E1 into work spaces refurbished by SSBA

K: These are on Spelman Street. They got an award, a really good scheme. They got another eighteen months, they still went to City and Guilds [vocational accreditation]. Eighteen months practical experience on a real site on a real contract. By the end of that they had enough expertise to go on another building site and not look as if they would be thrown off on week 2. Now what we obviously wanted to do was carry on, but at that stage, the late 80s and into the 90s there was a major collapse in the property market so I actually couldn’t find another large contract to keep it going.

N: So how many workspaces did they recover or refurbish?

K: In Spelman Street one, two, three, four - eight workspaces. The thing would be about 3000 sq. ft., maybe slightly more so it was quite a substantial contract, by the end of that they had a really good skill base. What happened was that I really couldn’t find another major contract, because no building work was going on and the rest of it, so what we did was that we consolidated into the Crown and Leek Joinery which still runs now.

As participants in the skills training program, workers were paid a training allowance. This, and the labor they provided on the building site, lowered SSBA’s costs as a property developer. In this capacity, and in their creation of a building and joinery firm, SSBA deployed a level of
entrepreneurship in the service of a visible community interest; namely, improving workspaces for local small business tenants. In this way, their entrepreneurship expanded the notion of community-led regeneration, from the high amount of participation of Planning for Real to the actual contribution of improving the local urban environment.

More recently, SSBA has used entrepreneurship as a tactic to meet the social and employment needs of local Bangladeshi women. These women, wives of men working in the garment workshops, needed an appropriate social local place where they could interact, learn English, and skills that would help generate income for themselves. Starting with 8 women and with money for training from the European Union, the Heba Women’s Project began to hold English classes, and later added courses in industrial machining and enterprise development. They added a workshop where the things some 40 women make in the machining course -- Christmas stockings, filling contracts for artists -- are sold in Heba’s shop in Brick Lane.

Heba, perhaps more than others, reveals the thin line SSBA walks in its promotion of an explicit entrepreneurial, income-generating approach to community development that retains overtones of paternalism. Their sophisticated range of tactics has raised several eyebrows of how SSBA ‘helps the community.’ Certainly, SSBA, like many inner-city organizations, needs to survive in a competitive grant- and contract-getting culture, a tier of service groups, albeit in the emerging voluntary and non-profit sectors, that provide services that the private sector finds unprofitable and the shrinking public sector can no longer afford. To its credit, SSBA’s organization as a community
business run by a voluntary management committee elected by members is more energetic, efficient, and grassroots than many other groups that profess to represent community interests in the inner city.

The emerging commercial activities of SSBA members are ostensibly to generate income and, arguably, to strengthen the economic base in a community, that, despite the 'capitalist energy' Spitalfields exudes, has considerable levels of unemployment and social deprivation (Robinson 1996). My initial reaction to HEBA, and Kay's related comment that one of the key objectives of the SSBA was to "get them [the women] trading" was that the SSBA was intent on making the disadvantaged capitalists. Kay did not disagree, reiterating that they were a form of community capitalism, where profits back into its operations, no dividends are paid to members, who mainly live and work, most of them in the garment industry.

For the SSBA, the core subject around which property development and small business advice has formed is the Bangladeshi garment worker and entrepreneur, male and female. Importantly, it is the presence of diasporic Bangladeshis in small businesses through which they are racialized and culturally marked. The garment industry in Spitalfields, from the prominence of French Huguenots in the local silk-weaving industry that reached its height in the 1740s and 1750s but continued until the 1830s (Porter: 132, 140, 195), has long been a index for local Otherness, a cultural, economic and spatial discourse (weavers' attics and Bangladeshi restaurants vs. merchant banks, for example) to define Spitalfields against the City, as well as other East End localities.
Moreover, a history of small enterprise at Spitalfields, linking such disparate people across centuries of migration such as the Huguenots, East European Jews and Bangladeshis, has become indispensable in two ways. On the one hand, it has been mobilized to racially and economically politicize the community (as an immigrant quarter fighting City encroachment). On the other hand, it has become pivotal in the successful place-marketing of Spitalfields by property developers and regeneration bureaucrats (as a quarter full of vibrant social history and migrant culture). It is this that makes a shared discourse possible among conservationists, regeneration executives, community development directors and community planners. It also marks a specifically localized discourse about Bangladeshis radically different from that at King’s Cross, where they seemingly have no visible economic function, and where neither the KXRLG nor the King’s Cross Partnership can offer them economic regeneration opportunities.

The SSBA, on the other hand, is able to erase the boundary between capitalism and progressive activism. It effectively argues, not without its critics, that since the Bangladeshi garment workers, and the East End in general, have already been incorporated within an international capitalist economy, the struggle is about how to negotiate better terms of trade from the inside. In settling for this compromise, the SSBA, despite its reservations about community development trusts, functions as one. It combines building and managing an ‘asset base’ (its 80 odd housing and workspace units) to help support its training programs (English and machining classes, Poetry in Wood for the disabled). Lastly, SSBA exemplifies what is increasingly called “social
entrepreneurship," precisely this bridge between capitalist activity and community activism for which non-profit organizations have become indispensable in leading the social, cultural and economic regeneration of the inner city.

Moreover, within the context of Spitalfields, stereotyped as the most deprived ward in Tower Hamlets, itself one of London’s (and Britain’s) poorest boroughs and being right next to the country’s financial engine, the City, SSBA has had amazing effect in helping maintain a buffer between the everyday life and livelihoods of its members, 80% in the garment industry, and the City. This buffer is possible because the SSBA does not only improve the workspaces and housing of the local quarter. Through its training programs, its newspaper, and the kinds of networks needed for a community business to fundraise effectively and to broker and secure property deals, it generates what Kay referred to as the linkages that build community. In her elaboration, Kay touches why Spitalfields is being recognized, by Londoners and increasingly, tourists, as an intimate inner city: a place which can support a diverse community in which a variety of everyday lives flourish in a physical environment that feels intimate and that has been made so, not least of all, by the efforts of conservation:

Kay: The whole thing about community and community involvement is that in order to have community, there has to be an involvement, but is not a general involvement. The strength of saying whether [a place] has nor hasn’t a community is the number of linkages. How many people talk to each other: strength and weakness of the community in part lies in the number of those linkages. So that I would say Spitalfields as a whole is a strong community because not because it has a unique voice, quite the reverse, it has thousands of voices, but they are all interacting all of the time. A person who lives in Spitalfields who also shops in Spitalfields who goes to the local ethnic shops down on Brick Lane, who then may take entertainment or a job at the local [pub].
And its strength as a community lies in those linkages and that complexity and the problem is, people continually try to simplify, in order to be able to deal with the complexity, and therefore give it the title the community, right. Fairly Complex. Different communities, yeah, all and sundry can be part of all of those communities - they can go for a walk, live in Spitalfields, shop in Spitalfields, work in Spitalfields. All of those are different sets of criteria, yeah. And so, I feel that instead of simplifying, [I ask] how many of those linkages exist? Spitalfields is a strong community, because it has all sorts of different [linkages], and you say something at the top of Brick Lane is at the bottom before you are, it will probably be in an entirely different form but is nevertheless there.

The whole thing about the definitions of communities becomes extremely simplistic, it never works the way people [want it to], it never gets everyone involved, because you can't have everyone involved all the time. Spitalfields is different from King's Cross and the Railway Lands because the Railway Lands generally did not have a great deal of community in the Railway Lands itself. It wasn't an empty site, because there were things going on, but fragmented things and therefore it didn't have a strong community; but it had a strong community around it who thought that they should benefit from it. Spitalfields is entirely the reverse, it had a very strong community going on and it feels that it doesn't want to be dispossessed.

Kay describes the key to successful and sustainable community development as the number of linkages across different local interests, which include economic development for Bangladeshi restaurateurs and garment workers, cultural and leisure uses at the Market site, the place-marketing initiatives of Tower Hamlets and Cityside, the newest regeneration partnership, and the conservation of Georgian Spitalfields. In spite of the heterogeneity of Spitalfields's people and space, and the cleavages between white upper middle class conservationists, young artists, City yuppies, white working class East Enders and Bangladeshi migrants, there are points of connection and engagement. It is this which makes Spitalfields a unique case in inner-city regeneration and which sets the stage for future innovation in local control and management of resources. For, it is the focus on acquiring, improving and managing property that transform the urbanist
agency of dedicated individuals into a community-based, non-profit but corporate agency. Indeed, it is this transformation of the kind of agency, vested in a trust arrangement, that is refiguring both the rhetorics of community at Spitalfields, and as we see in the last section on Cityside, the process in which potentially equitable urban revitalization happens.

CITYSIDE REGENERATION

Cityside Regeneration was formed over the summer of 1996 to further the regeneration process in Spitalfields and the west of Tower Hamlets borough that had been accomplished by the previous programs, namely the Bethnal Green City Challenge and the Spitalfields Task Force. Led by the local Tower Hamlets Council, and involving the Corporation of London, which governs the City and the Spitalfields Development Group, private sector owners of the former Spitalfields market site, a joint public-private partnership was formed to bid for £14 million of the central government’s SRB funds. As Andrew Bramidge, its current director and active in local regeneration for a decade, explains, Cityside was Bethnal Green City Challenge’s “forward strategy”:

There had been a tradition of other programs: Bethnal Green City Challenge, the Spitalfields Task Force, in the late 80s and early 90s, and then there was a feeling then, in the final years of Bethnal Green City Challenge. ... that more was to be done. A lot of things had been achieved, particularly around issues of housing, education, culture, and language development for the Bangladeshi community, provision of better community facilities – all had been achieved. But there were still issues around very high unemployment levels and the failure rate of small businesses, and the actual threat of the expansion of the City of London which in 1995, 1996 was very much apparent.
Fortunately, the Cityside bid was successful, receiving £11.4 million of government SRB funding. With this money, they hope to attract additional funding to have about £40 million. Tower Hamlets, Andrew mentioned, covers most of their operational costs and some of the big private companies provide contributions to pay for administrative costs.6 As part of East London’s Lea Valley, which stretches from Tower Hamlets and Hackney into Haringey and suburban Enfield, the Cityside area meets the European Union’s objective 2 status, which provides funds for areas that have suffered heavy de-industrialization due to a loss of manufacturing jobs.

With the successful bid, the partnership formed a company to run Cityside, and has a board of nearly two dozen. They include Tower Hamlets, the Corporation of London, SDG and Spitalfields Space Management, the local training and enterprise council, LETEC, and the umbrella organization of Tower Hamlet’s voluntary sector, the Community Organization forum. In addition, at the small end, there are three locally elected community representatives, the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust as well as, for a time, the SSBA. Its program is organized around three projects: “Breaking Stereotypes”; diversifying and developing the existing local economy; and, “Releasing the Visitor Economy,” that involves developing local urban tourism which I discuss in Chapter Six.

The Breaking Stereotypes program, in addition to its allusions to cultural diversity training, focuses on two initiatives: changing the recruiting practices of City companies and getting these companies to buy their supplies from local business. The first is to try to lower the level of unemployed college graduates
in Tower Hamlets by finding job opportunities for them in the financial services sector. The second is about “training and developing local businesses in quality systems and marketing” as well as serving as a broker between local businesses and the financial companies, getting them to do more business with each other.

The second project, the diversification of the local economy, focuses on supporting already existing sectors, such as the restaurant and garment industries, as well as new businesses, which, as Andrew aptly notes, “are rather in the supply businesses to the City or the arts and cultural industries.” An additional focus of this project is the Women’s Enterprise Project, which sees self-employed entrepreneurial women as a local growth sector.

Furthermore, to counteract the expansion of the financial district and corresponding rise in rents, Cityside is launching a Managed Workspace Program. Andrew describes:

Andrew: Over the last half of the program we’ll be spending between £4 and 5 million pounds on building new workspaces for small businesses.

Nityanand: You are actually building workspaces? That’s actually under your remit?

A: Yeah.

N: Oh, wow. Where are you building?

A: We’ve got some projects going on which [involve the] renovation of existing buildings, and in the development stage at the moment are three projects which will be completely new build on derelict sites. And, SSBA are keen partners and are in fact, two of the three projects we’ve got off the ground are with SSBA.

N: Oh, you’re working with SSBA?

A: Yeah, they will manage them, and what we are thinking about all of our workspaces is that they will be managed by the not-for-profit sector.
N: Yeah?!

A: So, we are not working with any private developers on that. The only way we think that we can keep rents down is by doing it with the not for profit sector.

N: That’s amazing.

A: Workspaces aren’t exactly a new concept in the regeneration programs in this country. But what tends to happen is that people have provided funding for private developers to come into areas, which is OK for awhile but after a few years the rents go up. Local businesses can’t afford them and move out. And it is hard, but we are working to develop projects which would operate on an entirely not for profit basis. So we are working with organizations like SSBA...we are funding them to do development.

We are acquiring a site for workspace development. [At the end of the program, the] space will be endowed in a community trust so that any surpluses created through the management of the workspace then goes straight back to the community. We’ve got two particular projects we’re working on at the moment that is basically one in Spitalfields and one in Shadwell [south of Spitalfields, along the Thames]. But the difficulty for us is acquiring the land in the first place.

N: Because of –

A: Price.

N: Even down here (pointing to a map of the regeneration district)?

A: Shadwell is cheaper. The site we are looking at down there is in the ownership of four different people. One of them is the council and three are private owners, so now we are trying to put together a package and once we do that, we’ll create a community trust to own and manage the worksite.

N: So that has got support from the board?

A: That was a policy decision we took about a year ago when we were developing our workspace program. We made clear decisions to go down that route rather than working with private developers. And we get private developers knocking on our door all the time. They want to do projects with us, which we could do. we could spend all the money quite easily, but the end result is huge and more expensive.

After spending so much time at King’s Cross and seeing the lack of communication between the King’s Cross Partnership and the King’s Cross...
Railway Lands Group, even with something as relatively simple as defining a mandate for a community development worker, Cityside’s approach took me by surprise. The Managed Workspace Program is the pinnacle of a regeneration apparatus that strives to further community development initiatives already in place in the district. It also reveals the level of confidence Cityside's board members, which include major financiers and property developers, have in the non-profit sector to effectively manage small workspaces as a tactic to keep rents affordable to small business.

This in and of itself is new for a SRB to take on; Andrew mentioned that he had to go through several talks with the Government Office for London to approve the program. Rather than reiterating the slogans of public-private partnerships, fully cognizant of the problems of private sector development can create for fragile inner city economies, Cityside endeavors to show the efficacy of a non-profit approach to urban regeneration. This consists of at one level, the involvement of the non-profit sector in the decision-making process of Cityside’s board.

In addition, it deploys “asset-based development,” that is, the generation and management of assets such as housing and workspaces to entrench the non-profit sector in the otherwise speculation-bent development of urban space. Property speculation especially hits inner-city areas on the fringes of expanding central business districts, of which Spitalfields, abutting the City, Britain’s financial center, is a pre-eminent example. Hence, that the new and refurbished workspaces will be placed under and then managed under a community trust further illustrates the strength of “asset-based development” as a tactic that can
safeguard the economic priorities of inner-city people in their own places of residence and/or work.

Thus, both the SSBA and Cityside endorse capitalism, especially in its small-scale entrepreneurial and immigrant forms. For them, the struggle is how capitalism is to be practised in a way that will be of maximum benefit to the people who live and work in Spitalfields. ‘Community,’ in the discourses and practices of Spitalfields regeneration – and this includes the board members and the public, private and non-profit interests they represent, and the three Cityside projects – has been translated into a capitalist lexicon that privileges the economic.

At King’s Cross, the terrain of antagonism is idealized, either in the KXRLG’s past work in alternatively planning the Railway Lands or in the current campaigns to disband the costly CTRL plans in favor of reviving CrossRail. However, what the KXRLG, the SSBA and Cityside share is a struggle for scale (Smith 1998). For the KXRLG, the struggle is to prevent the massive size of the CTRL, with an altered and expanded St Pancras station as an international terminus, its demolition and alteration of everyday landmarks, and the preference of large-scale projects such as football stadiums or convention centers for revitalizing the underused Railway Lands. There, ‘community’ means the retention of the intimate and unique, if dishevelled, brick-and-iron landscape.

(Image 22) Promiscuous (R)use: Spitalfields status as a silk weaving district, particularly in the 1730s-1740s, returns as tool to market expensive residential
properties on the north side of the Market and within stone-throwing distance to the glass and steel towers of the City, including the peering Balfour-Beatty tower.

At Spitalfields, the struggle is the scale of entrepreneurial and commercial property development in which a notion of community has been effectively incorporated. Here, the threat is much more concrete. During 1998, the cranes of the international construction firm, Balfour-Beatty, soared as the ABN-Amro building rose along Bishopsgate between Liverpool Street Station and the Spitalfields Market. On the north end of the Market, the neatly trimmed lawn in front of the upscale housing development of ‘St George’s – the Silk Quarter’ promiscuously appropriates Spitalfields’ cultural history even as it sanitizes its residues for the ever-incoming financial sector executives. Both are reflections of a burgeoning City whose sense of scale in business and in its physical landscape is totally at odds with adjacent Spitalfields, with its New Georgian historic districts, Brick Lane curry houses and sweet shops, and leftover medieval streets such as Petticoat Lane where Sunday street markets flourish. Moreover, it is the struggle to maintain this scale, in which the migrant small entrepreneur can thrive, that colludes with the aestheticization of everyday
life in Spitalfields, already clichés in London’s latest “cultural quarter” (see Chapter Six).

Nevertheless, the local institutional embeddedness of non-profit strategies to steer and manage economic growth that the Workspace program has its faultlines. The controversy over the LIFFE scheme at the western end of Spitalfields Market is easily the most prominent example.

The LIFFE, the London International Financial Futures and Options Exchange, bought the site in December 1996 for some £44 million for a new headquarters that would consolidate its scattered offices around the City (Jordan 1998; Financial Times 1998). For the Spitalfields Development Group (SDG), active in Cityside’s regeneration programs, the LIFFE scheme meant the end of their long and repeatedly frustrated attempt to realize the redevelopment of the Market. Jacobs (1996: 85-93) analyzes this saga in depth. I summarize it here to argue that it displaced an earlier antagonism between large-scale capitalism and municipal socialism, characteristic of Thatcherite Britain, and still visible in the KXRLG’s protracted struggle over the redevelopment at King’s Cross. This displacement, as we have seen, gives way to the community capitalism of the SSBA and Cityside, transforming the discourse and practice of local urban regeneration.

The Spitalfields Market controversy began in 1987, when its owner, the Corporation of London, leased it to SDG, a consortium of three property development companies. SDG were to remove the fruit and vegetable market
that had occupied the site since the late seventeenth century and redevelop it for
major office and retail use. The proposed redevelopment met with major local
opposition, leading to the formation of the “Campaign to Save Spitalfields from
the Developer,” made up of the “local Labour Party and what remained of a
decimated community service sector” (Jacobs: 93). For the opponents, Jacobs
continues, “the redevelopment of the Market site was read quite simply as the
City (Big Capital) invading the home of the working class” (95).

SDG won the tender with a scheme designed by architects Fitzroy
Robinson in conjunction with Richard MacCormac, who, Jacobs reports, “was a
founding member of the Spitalfields Trust and since 1979 had lived and worked
in Spitalfields in a nineteenth-century brewery which the Trust had ‘rescued’”
(89-90). As such, his scheme had confidence among the conservationists to
retain and enhance the historic character of the Conservation Areas that
surround the Market site. However, SDG appointed another firm to serve as
lead architects, the American Swanke Hayden Connell, causing MacCormac to
withdraw. Swanke Hayden Connell proposed a bulkier scheme which provided
more office space, but which “met with fierce opposition from local and
national conservationist interests” (90). The alliance between the Trust and
national amenity societies ensured a successful campaign against the new
scheme, which was called in for public planning inquiry in 1989. SDG
withdrawed the scheme, proposed various others, but these, faced with the
additional inquiry about where to locate the former fruit and vegetable market,
left the future of the site undetermined until LIFFE purchased the site at 280
Bishopsgate, which includes the western part of the Market.
During the mid 1990s, the fruit and vegetable market was moved to South London. Rather than left to dereliction, the SDG further leased the space to Spitalfields Space Management, to get in a range of interim tenants. Its director, Eric Reynolds, had achieved notoriety with redeveloping the industrial buildings at Camden Lock, on the Regent’s Canal up from King’s Cross into a sprawling leather goods and artisan market. Around the perimeter of the former Market, Reynolds leased small spaces for a range of uses, including a designer boutique, bookstore, hair salon, Thai restaurant, gallery space, and the offices of Cityside and the Tower Hamlets Information Centre.

(Images 23 & 24) Interim uses inside Spitalfields Market
Inside, in the eastern portion of the market, artisans, organic food producers, ceramic tile artists, book and record dealers, chocolatiers and candle makers set up shop on the weekends. On the western side, youngish people play ball sports in a series of netted courts. These interim uses themselves have "become big attractions on the London tourist route" (Pike 1998).

With the LIFFE scheme, as Andrew explains below, part of these uses would be retained, while the sport facilities area would become a financial office tower. The SSBA was against the LIFFE scheme, arguing that the interim current cultural, entertainment, and leisure uses at least were more accessible to its members than corporate headquarters of international banks. However, for Andrew, the LIFFE scheme was a chief example in the growing co-operation between the City and Spitalfields. LIFFE had committed itself to participate in major in Cityside’s "Breaking Stereotypes" program. Andrew explains:

Andrew: LIFFE actually forms part of the site, we still expect half of the market site will still be developed for office accommodation.

Nityanand: What kind of offices, big?

A: Yeah, financial. In might not happen in the next couple of months, there has been a bit of a downturn in the financial sector, but it is a
large place within a few minutes’ walk from Liverpool Street Station so it will have to be attractive.

N: Aren’t you concerned how it will affect rents?

A: Yes, this is what led to the development of the [Cityside] program. When this program was put together a few years ago, we knew that Spitalfields Market was going to be developed as a major, financial sector space. So, that was one of the things that led to the development of the program. We have our view of the Market. Yes, it has the effect of raising rents in the area and threatening small businesses, but that’s why we do the workspace program.

N: There are interim uses [in the Market]. What if they want to stay in Spitalfields?

A: Some of them will stay...This end [i.e., eastern portion] of the Market will stay as shops, restaurants. There will still be a market in the middle. So a lot of the activities that take place will continue. It might be that some may move in the workspaces we are building. Another thing is that it will bring many, many jobs to the area, and we welcome that because this area has one of the highest levels of unemployment.

N: But how will they get jobs in the financial sector? Oh, are you talking about the graduates?

A: Well, partly on that level, but also the LIFFE scheme which received planning permission last year would have seen somewhere [between] 10 to 12,000 people on site. Some of those would be highly paid but most of the jobs are in support functions. We would be looking to get employment there, with 10 to 12,000 people coming on the site there would be a huge need for additional retail, restaurant activities, activities which could employ local people. So the development of the site was going to create huge employment opportunities for local people. One of our jobs was to get local people to actually get those jobs. So we supported the development and I know a lot of people don’t but at the end of the day, this area has one of the highest levels of unemployment in the whole country. I think it will take something of that scale to change that.

However, in August 1998, LIFFE announced that it was going digital, investing some £25 million in a screen-based trading system, thus obviating the need for more floor space, and dashing Cityside’s hopes for massive job creation. According to the deal LIFFE had made with the City, Kay told me that they had until November of that year to hand over the hard cash. LIFFE thought
they could sell the site for £56 million, and thus make a tidy profit, to a third party. In September, the *Estates Gazette*, a British property trade journal, was reporting that the American financial company Banker’s Trust was interested in the site at 280 Bishopsgate for its London’s headquarters. This move would make them neighbors of the Dutch bank, ABN Amro, who would be moving its European headquarters into the fall of 1999 into nearly 400,000 sq. ft of office space at 250 Bishopsgate.

Cityside, previously coveting 10,000 jobs for local people with the LIFFE scheme, now hopes for some of the 1,000 new ones at ABN Amro (Pike 1998). With its argument for the need for a large-scale initiative to inject jobs into the local economy, Cityside temporarily forgot to heed its own advice regarding the smallness of the scale needed to safeguard economic opportunities for Spitalfields residents. To ensure that smallness, Cityside and the SSBA will have to collaborate, not with the financial denizens of the City, but, as we will see more clearly in Chapter Six, the still-incoming impresarios of a new cultural quarter.

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1 All italics in the original. Whitechapel Road forms the southern boundary of Spitalfields and is a major road leading into the heart of the East End, an important commercial strip as well as the site of the contemporary art space, Whitechapel Art Gallery, and the considerably older Whitechapel Hospital. Tower Hamlets, east of the City and north of the River Thames, is one of Greater London’s 33 boroughs. It includes areas such as Bow, Poplar, Stepney, Shadwell and the Docklands; Spitalfields is officially one of the wards of Tower Hamlets.

2 Wright discusses at length Alexandra Artley’s participation and later disgust at conservation’s aestheticization of the inner city that went hand in hand with the New Georgian movement. Artley is a writer and married to architectural historian Gavin Stamp. John Martin Robinson is a prominent Tory conservationist who had worked at the Greater London Council’s Historic
Building Division, but is better known as an apologist for aristocracy (see Wright: 108). On Artley, Wright elaborates:

Alexandra Artley, on the other hand, has turned against the more recent manifestations of the New Georgian spirit. In The New Georgian Handbook, she had celebrated the interest of places that were still ‘socially crunchy’ and had a ‘healthy mix of young, old, crimes [criminals], Bangladeshis, clergy and council estaters’, but by the end of 1986 she had cut through the beady-eyed New Georgian style of observation, and rediscovered the non-architectural...distinctly old Georgian themes of charity, social responsibility, and equality before the Lord (109).

3 I have Marta Galicki to thank for making this point explicit to me at the start of this project, during our first talks in Houston in April 1997.

4 Angela Monaghan, the Director of the Development Trusts Association, in her argument for changes in public sector policy that would ameliorate the conditions under which development trusts function says:

The Charity Commissioners should recognise economic regeneration by community-based, not-for-private-profit organisations as a legitimate charitable activity. This would, after all, simply bring old-fashioned notions of relief of poverty, education and support for other charities up to date with current practices and language (1994: 90).

5 Sheppard bought the Truman Brewery at an auction. In 1989, he removed the brewing equipment, a London feature since the mid-seventeenth century, but kept the physical structure intact for uses as wholesale, import and export enterprises, as well as, the newer uses of galleries, night-clubs, and a café. Grand Metropolitan plc would get further into the regeneration racket by setting up its own charity to run their projects, which besides the great public relations, allowed them to access European and Government money (Kay Jordan, Interview 10 June 1998).

6 Cityside’s offices, for example, are on the Spitalfields market site, owned by SDG and managed by Spitalfields Space Management, by Eric Reynolds. Despite my efforts, I was unable to get a hold of Reynolds for his views on economic regeneration, interim uses in sites awaiting redevelopment, and the repackaging of Spitalfields as a cultural quarter.
CHAPTER FIVE

MAKING MONEY IN THE MUCK?: URBAN ENVIRONMENTALISM AT THE BATTLEBRIDGE CENTRE, KING’S CROSS

“...what made her indue the antique with this glamour – this sham lure...?”

Advocacy has long been a concern for anthropologists, motivating and forming research agendas. Whether among traditional areas of anthropological concern – indigenous peoples, peasants, or poor city dwellers in the South - or in addressing newer issues such as identity politics, new reproductive technology and genetic engineering, a spirit of advocacy or activism accompanies ethnographic fieldwork. These latter issues, reflective of transnational movements of capital and labor within an increasingly image-saturated globalized culture, invoke the dilemma of representation, and relatedly, ethnographic authority and responsibility, that marked the 1980 critiques of anthropology (Clifford and Marcus, ed., 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986).

In part in response to these shifts in anthropological research, Marcus reposes the question of ethnographic activism as a methodological rather than an ideological commitment, emerging in a mobile, multi-sited research framework within and about a global system (1995:113-114). This activism, Marcus explains, emerges in a roving, “multi-sited” research process:

In practice, multi-sited fieldwork is thus always conducted with a keen awareness of being within the landscape, and as the landscape changes across sites, the identity of the ethnographer requires negotiation...The movement among sites (and levels of society) lends a character of activism to such an investigation. This is not (necessarily) the traditional
self-defined activist role claimed by the left-liberal scholar for his or her work. That is, it is not the activism claimed in relation to affiliation with a particular social movement outside academia or the domain of research, nor is it the academic claim to an imagined vanguard role for a particular style of writing or scholarship with reference to a posited ongoing politics in a society or culture at a specific historic moment. Rather, it is activism quite specific and circumstantial to the conditions of doing multi-sited research itself (112, 113).

Within the context of urban ethnography, we can link Marcus’s notion of an activism formed in the interfaces of multiple research sites through which the ethnography is constructed, to one of the flâneur as a way of experiencing, analyzing and narrating urban space. As I discussed in Chapter One, the flâneur represents a critical position vis-à-vis the growing commodity circuits of late nineteenth century industrial capital. In the novels of Iain Sinclair, for example, the flâneur is reclaimed and refriguered for late twentieth century London. However, unlike what Marcus claims for an idealized circumstantial activist, both Sinclair (1995, 1997) and the flâneur — and of course, they are often one and the same, -- do claim “an imagined vanguard role for a particular style of writing or scholarship,” albeit admittedly un- or even anti-academic. Nonetheless, the important point which we should concede to Marcus’s notion is the unpredictability of the “where the next interview takes you” part of ethnographic research, making for a sense of commitment and a political practice in the field that is tangential to specific events and thus is always forming.

In London, I was keenly aware of this morphology of ethnographic politics as I moved between and about fieldwork sites and spoke to various commentators. For me, the predicament of commitment asserted itself in how to respond to these
sites and people. Both King's Cross and Spitalfields represent community politics and immense regeneration potential. Both are laden with conservation areas and the lure of a stylized everyday life in a fragmented, yet still-meaningful urban landscape. Nonetheless, the antagonistic politics of community planning of the King's Cross Railway Lands Group (KXRLG) is vastly different from the entrepreneurial community capitalism of Spitalfields Small Business Association (SSBA). Moreover, the aesthetic politics of place, architecture and history of local and national conservationists bear little resemblance to those of the artists, media directors and producers who herald the growth of local cultural industries in these districts.

The appeal of doing ethnography in London is precisely these kinds of tensions, but it also involves at times the anxious recognition that, as an ethnographer, one is moving through these practices and the everyday lives and livelihoods they signify. As an ethnographer, I knew that despite my intense sympathies for these practices, I was a transient. I delved into two urban spaces fraught with contested identity, I asked questions and recorded answers, I attended lectures, consultations, and meetings, I went to the pub or met people for coffee, lunch, rarely dinner, but, most certainly in 'their' eyes, I didn't stay for very long. Seventeen months is insufficient in the making of the Londoner. Nonetheless, with my roving, ideas and issues did crystallize, focusing researching questions, even if scattering avenues toward an answer. For me, it was the dilemma of "community" which interwove the different sites of King's Cross and Spitalfields, and had resonances with conservation and cultural sector cognoscenti. And, it was the
example of the Battlebridge Centre and discussions with its creator and manager, Julie Lowe, that forced me to look at the ethics of community, its relationship to regeneration strategies, and to understand it as a shifting trope in the real and imagined everyday life of the inner city.

Throughout the bulk of my fieldwork, I was trying to organize a photographic exhibition about the King’s Cross Railway Lands. It first occurred to me as a new volunteer in October 1997 at the KXRLG that an exhibition would help strengthen the public presence of the group, which had increasing difficulty legitimizing itself with other community groups and the local authority, Camden, alike. Although the KXRLG’s Management Committee felt strongly about the planning, development, and transport issues that the CTRL development entailed, they had yet to find allies to help share and support their vision – a community-led regeneration of the Railway Lands.

In the ‘therapy’ sessions with Esther Asamoah, then of the Civic Trust Regeneration Unit, the group’s Management Committee realized that it needed to rethink how it conceptualized “community,” and whom it represented and served. On one hand, it was common knowledge that membership was not growing, with many members on the rolls not having paid for two or three years. So that, while KXRLG claimed to represent 350 groups and individuals, only 150-160 of them had actually paid their dues in the last 2 years. Second, KXRLG was under pressure from Camden to keep statistics on the profile of its members based on
gender, race, residence, and so on. Like other municipal authorities, Camden wanted to make sure that it was funding a "representative" group, a socially and culturally diverse community group serving an equally diverse community. There were, for example, only a handful of Bangladeshi residents, who easily make up a third of King's Cross's official population, who were also members, even though there was Bangladeshi representation at the level of the Management Committee.

Beyond this accounting of diversity was the growing visibility of change in the urban landscape. Art bars, clubs, galleries, and 'ethnic' restaurants were all emerging in King's Cross' major streets; only two of them, a pizzeria and Cubitt Gallery, an artists' collective, were members of the group. This evidence of change in the uses of urban space also linked to my personal interest for a more engaged historic conservation practice. I saw the conservation of the cityscape as a way to trace the complexity of spatial relationships over time in order to understand the shifting social groups that worked and lived in buildings. Since everything of historical value was listed at King's Cross -- although the CTRL construction threatens the demolition, removal and severe alteration of a number of key local landmarks and buildings -- I would need another strategy.

I began to ask how the new aesthetic and consumption-oriented landscape could be juxtaposed, even incorporated into a community politics that emphasized creative appropriations of King's Cross industrial and railway landscape. Across King's Cross and around Battlebridge Basin, for example, formerly derelict buildings had been reclaimed and restyled to form waterfront lofts, and to house
the offices and studios for DEGW, an architectural firm, and Macmillans, a magazine publisher.

(Images 25 & 26) **New marina landscapes**: Above, the view from the Waterside Bar during the afternoon lull. The revitalized Battlebridge Basin includes the expensive white and glass building, Ice Wharf. Below: Adjacent to the Waterside is the recycled warehouse home of architectural firm, DEGW.

Southeast of the station, behind a group of cobblestoned streets overpassing the Metropolitan Line, were others signs of change. In a former stable there was Smithy’s wine bar, and nearby in an unused warehouse that now featured a Disneyland-like landscape of chairs that looked like cars and water moving in Plexiglas tubing across the ceiling, EMR, a company that produced radio
programs. These recyclings served as entrepreneurial, yet innovative ways to activate conservation, not in the name of listing new buildings or getting another conservation area designated, but to make conservation meaningful to a larger range of people and interests.

At Spitalfields, the ingenious strategy that the SSBA and the Spitalfields Trust used was to actively generate a sense of solidarity through property and enterprise. Even in the training arm of the SSBA where Bangladeshi women are taught industrial machining and English, the objective is to encourage them to make and sell craft goods. The properties that the SSBA acquired and renovated have been re-let to local small business people in the area’s overwhelmingly Bangladeshi-run garment industry. Moreover, with some eighty local properties, the SSBA has effectively buffered, perhaps even impeded the expansion of the financial district and its accompanying property speculation.

However, this process has taken twenty years. I couldn’t expect this at King’s Cross. Its neglect has been more protracted, but there are other factors. These include the mismanagement of regeneration by the King’s Cross Partnership; the oligarchic structure of land ownership; the lack of a small business or civic association to link local groups and enterprises; and fourth, the poor conditions of the public housing blocks where many of the locals lived. Moreover, recognizing the arduous and uphill struggle at Spitalfields to generate a shared sense of community across difference, to make, as Kay says, linkages, I realized that community couldn’t be built overnight.
Could the exhibition get the ball rolling? For example, could it be a vehicle to publicize the past work of the KXRLG as well reiterate its alternative vision for the Railway Lands? Could it help trigger the desire for the core members to start realizing the long-held collective dream of the group, that is, to set up a community development trust? The group had longed understood that an effective campaign for affordable housing and local employment, and a vision of a mixed-use ‘urban village’ on the Railway Lands required that they have a greater stake in the area than an office with one part-time administrator.

The first step to realizing the ideal of the community development trust, I thought, becoming aware of how incremental changes were happening in King’s Cross despite the uncertainty over the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. These changes were ones of use. For example, just during fieldwork, the Al-Nehar Mosque and Education Centre on Northdown Street and Caledonia Road opened in a former pub (right).
An ‘Indian and Thai’ lunchbox and restaurant in the landmark ‘Lighthouse block’ also had opened for business (although it would close just before I left in December 1998). A few blocks away, a young entrepreneur opened a refurbished Lincoln Arms, with skylights and canvases, as a lounge bar (pictured in the next chapter as “Cool Britannia at King’s Cross”).

I was intrigued by how to describe the ongoing changes in land use, although I had never explored it, either through photography or political economy. But, in the middle of the first of my two marathon interviews with Kay, director of the SSBA, I was asked: “What gives land value?” At my drawing a blank, she said, “Its use.” One of the chief concerns of SSBA is how to keep rents affordable for Bangladeshi and other small entrepreneurs in the garment and nascent artisanal industries in Spitalfields. This required maintaining light industrial and commercial uses in the area that would help prevent encroachment from large office developments, or more garment workshops on listed streets becoming upscale housing.

Conservation for the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust has been overwhelmingly pre-occupied with keeping Georgian-era houses as ‘single family’ homes. In Islington, with its Georgian and Victorian terrace houses anchoring conservation areas that cover a third of the borough, and consequently making for an inflated private-sector residential market, the Islington Buildings Preservation Trust could turn to securing futures for historic buildings which couldn’t be preserved through commercial use. As board member of the Islington trust and
KXRLG MC member, local conservationist Lisa Pontecorvo emphasized (see Chapter Two) that conservation shouldn’t be about “prettifying property” but about “finding new uses for old buildings.”

So, I began to re-think the exhibition along the lines of showing the mixture of uses and to document ongoing or imminent change in housing (public and private), historic buildings and landmarks, green as well as derelict space, and what I call the emergent cultural sector. In order to ‘get community input,’ I wrote appeals for stories and opinions directed to readers in Carrion, the KXRLG newsletter. I sent out memos to tenant association representatives to invite them to talk about the building in which they lived. Additionally, I was already in the process of doing interviews about the enterprises that would form the bulk of my chapter on the cultural sector.

The more relationships I tried to establish with various associations, the more cultural sector entrepreneurs that I talked to, the more I realized that this is what the group needed to do – to walk up and down the streets and get better acquainted with its constituents. I began to think of the exhibition as a stepping stone to a more dynamic KXRLG. With its panoramic view of the complexity and diversity of King’s Cross’s urban landscape, the exhibition would increase the local audience for community-led renewal. In the process, the group, proud of its past work, could reclaim its former respect, community could again begin to be built, and conservation interests, foregrounded in the various existing land uses at King’s Cross, could be visually communicated to a broader, more socially and racially diverse audience.
In terms of time, however, I sensed that I was over-ambitious. It was tough fitting an exhibition in my tightening fieldwork schedule. Perhaps I underestimated the "cynicism of the locals," Labour councilor Sybil Shine said to me when I told her how I was getting no responses from the tenant associations. Nonetheless, my enthusiasm wasn't in vain, for in the process of scouting interest for the exhibition, I met Julie Lowe.

Julie Lowe ran the Battlebridge Centre. Just behind and to the west of the tracks that run from Scotland into London at King's Cross Station, and off cobblestoned Battlebridge Road, the Centre's original application for planning permission in May 1993 read as such:

Change of use of the site from motor repair depot to mixed use comprising the erection of chalet style demountable residential units for single people, an "eco-house" development and conversion of main shed to provide holistic health centre, entertainment stage and exhibition space, shops, restaurant, workshops and resource office, garden centre, showers, laundry facilities for rough sleepers and site warden accommodation (London Borough of Camden 1993).

I met with Julie, the director of the non-profit Community Creation Trust, which technically ran the Battlebridge Centre, hardly six weeks before I left London. By the time I arrived on a Sunday afternoon in the middle of November 1998, Battlebridge was being dismantled. National Freight Consortium (NFC), the owners of the motor repair depot, and one of the handful of large landlords in the Railway Lands, had told the Centre to leave by January 31, 1999. All the artisans in the eight workshop spaces had closed down and moved to other sites. Eleven of the twelve chalets -- one-room units made of unfinished wood -- had been vacated.
When Julie showed them to me, a worker was in the process of taking out the plumbing. (Julie was adamant about leaving NFC nothing). The space inside the chalet was small, even by British standards. Nonetheless, a shower and toilet, a cooking area and an area for work with bookcases had been provided in three of the four corners. Plants in the collective garden at the back had been uprooted. Near the entrance to the centre, the organic café, with its counters and chairs still in place, was closed. Lastly, the extravagant launching of Film Four, Channel 4's brand-new cable TV channel, had trashed the 1960s concrete warehouse space that had housed the motor repair depot.

As I stepped over debris and looked at the gaping holes in the ceiling, I realized, with anxiety but also relishing my 'discovery,' that I was almost too late. The fact that I had almost missed all of this intensified the lure of Battlebridge. I had come to meet a "community person," wearing the hat of a curator for the KXRLG. I had come in request for photographs and a personalized anecdote for the exhibition. I would never see the eco-village at its height. Yet, standing amid the wreckage of the Film Four party, I realized that this might have been what I had been in search of at King's Cross for over a year, of a project that had an energetic vision similar to the SSBA, and yet understood the grit that is King's Cross.

The SSBA, as I attempted to demonstrate in the previous chapter, built itself through managing housing and workspace as a community business, and thereby generating what Jane Jacobs called a community of interest (1961:128). Community was a posteriori. However, for the KXRLG, a community of interest was presumed from the group's start; it was foundational, a priori. In its planning
applications for the Railway Lands, which sought to manage local need for affordable housing and amenities against the desire among the developers for lucrative office towers, and in the Interim Uses Initiative, the group were insurgent urbanists, trying to realize an utopian King’s Cross for “the community.”

That utopian impulse, albeit in a radically different constellation and genealogy of development, was intrinsic to Battlebridge Centre. In an important sense, it was the brainchild of Julie Lowe. The eco-village was her idea, the Community Creation trustees were her friends, from the North of England as she was, and largely quiescent regarding how Battlebridge was run. It was Julie, after all, who lived at Battlebridge as the site warden, or den mother, managing the day-to-day operations. It was she who had been developing the idea for an eco-village during the late 1980s and had exhibited a proposal for it at an ecological design fair in 1991.

Julie had interested the affluent borough of Sutton in suburban southwest London in the idea of an eco-village, proposing to build a community that would be powered by alternative energy. It was her ex-partner, an Etonian (and thus well connected), who was and still remains active in local civic politics in Camden, who told her about the prospective availability of the NFC site. NFC agreed to give the land rent-free until the construction of the CTRL began. They weren’t too interested in ecology; rather, for them, it was an opportunity to improve their heavily tarnished public image. Moreover, as the CTRL Act was passed only in 1996, it would appear that NFC was confident that construction would begin in
early 1998. So, the original planning permission for Battlebridge Centre, which expired October 31, 1997, was accepted.

Julie admitted to me that the eco-village never reached its utopian formation, outlined in the planning permission to Camden above. Nonetheless, over its five years, there were clear successes in terms of the resources that were mobilized and the people who benefited from Battlebridge. The chalets housed numerous single people who were homeless. They were referred from the Simon Community, a local agency working for the homeless, and the Big Issue, the weekly news magazine that represents the interests on people living on the street, now located diagonally across the offices of KXRLG on Pentonville Road. The actual building and joinery work was supplied under the auspices of a government training program called “Community Action.” Julie estimated that some 400 people went through this training program, gaining skills as they built the chalets and workspaces. Furthermore, virtually all the property surveying, legal and accountancy assistance were done pro bono. In fact, the value of voluntary work was so great that in one year it was worth some 40% of the turnover of the Trust.

Managing the construction of a prototypical eco-village in the heart of Britain’s railway quarter, co-ordinating training programs, housing the unhoused all showed Julie to be an adept businesswoman. Yet, the ethos she claimed behind it was a spiritual one. Julie’s own politics had been developed in the anti-nuclear protests in the 1970s; she was one of the women who had marched on Greenham Common. That confrontational style had been melded with a matriarchalist eco-feminism, New Age holism, and a remembrance of the legend of Queen Boadicea,
leader of an East Anglian tribe who had fought one of her London battles against the Roman rulers of London at King's Cross. "Without spirituality," Julie cryptically said to me, "there can be no community." To this end, she had encouraged holistic health and healing workshops from the outset. In addition, there was the compost project in the garden that would help fertilize vegetables, as well as the organic café, in which some of the homeless could work.

Yet, in her pursuit of building a eco-village in the inner city, in housing the homeless and training the unskilled, in re-enchanting King's Cross with a sense of solidarity, Julie alienated the people who lived in Culross and Stanley Buildings, the two major dwellings on the Railway Lands. Culross was literally across the street, on the other side of Battlebridge Road. The two sets of Stanley Buildings were down the way. As Julie saw it, few of the residents were interested in getting Battlebridge off the ground in 1993. She described how some of them had come by with offers of help, or ideas for projects, but never returned or followed through. I commented that her energy and pragmatism smacked of middle class opportunism in their eyes. She agreed but retorted that she was not middle class, but raised in foster care. I asked why didn’t they want to participate; she said, and here we have echoes of Cyril in *High Hopes*, "because they don’t get off their arses." With this kind of mutual accusation, I wasn’t surprised to read letters complaining about noisy parties in Battlebridge’s file in Camden’s planning department. The irony, Julie said, was that now that Battlebridge was closing, she was getting condolences.
For the locals – at least for those I spoke to – Julie was an outsider, someone who had come to King’s Cross for her own financial gain. Their notion of community meant being working-class tenants at King’s Cross for a considerable number of years, waiting for change. Julie, however, eager to transform a motor repair depot into a thriving eco-village, acted like an innovative developer in the name of community. She developed working relationships, however forced and strained, with NFC property managers, she used the Community Creation Trust’s charity status to obtain free labor in exchange for providing construction training opportunities for the unemployed, she rented out warehouse space for undisclosed amounts for nighttime media events.

In short, Julie found no trouble in joining Battlebridge’s committed environmentalist and community development orientations to trafficking in King’s Cross image as a quirky cultural and entertainment area. It is this flexibility and strategic breadth that made Julie an asset to transforming King’s Cross. She had combined her commitment to small-scale development and urban environmentalism, her ability to communicate her vision to locally significant public and private interests, and her knack to traffic in the gritty glamour of King’s Cross’s notorious night life. Her urbanist agency – community mixed with enterprise – was similar to that of Kay at SSBA. Yet, who beyond the transient homeless were her constituents now? For, the question lingers, transforming it into what? For, as I narrate below, her complicity in King’s Cross’s aestheticization suggests a narrowing rather than an expansion of interests in the game to repackage the inner city.
Except for the kebab/burger joint, the Chinese take-away and the off-license store with the massive Doberman, the shop-lined curve of Albion Road, where each day I pass on my way to and from the 73 bus stop, has shut down for the night. I fiddle with my collar, and wait, thinking about the suitcases in the room I rent at a Milton Grove Victorian maisonnette that were bulging with half of my belongings: books, file folders, and clothes. I am leaving early tomorrow morning at 5 for Heathrow to fly back to Toronto. I stare out into the dark street, make out the disheveled triangle of grass across me behind the bus stop where I’ll get off later tonight when two 73 buses arrive.

I get on the second and settle on the upper deck. I crack open the window, and feel the cool air rush in. The bus is fairly empty still, and we sail down Albion Road, around Newington Green, and then head down the Essex Road. The ghostliness of the burnt-out but still impressive Gothic church, which is being converted into a non-traditional private children’s school, is quickly surpassed by the gritty glitter of the Mecca Bingo Hall further down. As we continue, public housing gives way to posh boutiques, hair salons, and real estate agents, announcing our arrival at the Angel, the heart of Islington. The bus stops, some people
alight, more get on, and we veer past the 43 and 19, to the right lane to turn westward onto Pentonville Road and into central London.

Looking out of the window, at the crest of the descent, I am able to make out the clock tower of St Pancras. The double-decker turns and speeds down the hill and the clock tower gets smaller and smaller. We pass the green mound at Clarendon Square, and the bright blue gates of Penton Rise, a rehabilitated council housing tower block. After this, the buildings are set closer together, grayer and narrower. The bus turns by the Scala Cinema, which is getting a facelift courtesy of the King’s Cross Partnership, a huge purple and white banner informs us, and I ring the bell to get off. I cross the street, waiting at the island at the Lighthouse Block for the light to change to green. After it does, I pass by the passengers waiting for the 73 and 30, and see that the newsstand where I’d buy *The Guardian* is still busy at almost half past seven.

The automatic doors of King’s Cross station open to reveal the last heave of commuters and passengers making their way around or out of London. Walking toward the platforms, I cut across a gap in a line of people waiting for the train to Edinburgh to begin boarding. I make a sharp left, and walk past the Great Northern Hotel where the KXRLLG hold their meetings, diagonally across the parking lot and onto Cheney Road, the most filmed road in Britain, a local resident had informed me. A few lights are on in the flats of Stanley Buildings, and by the top of the road,
where Cheney and Battlebridge Roads join, the din of the station is gone, replaced now by giggles and the clip of heels hitting the cobblestone on the way to Battlebridge Centre. Several cars have parked, even a black Porsche. Not your everyday encounter on Battlebridge Road, but then this, a designer’s exhibition of homes created for the “single homeless,” is not your everyday event. Or so I hope.

The entrance to Battlebridge Centre is a huge squarish wooden gate. Some of the clipping heel lot have arrived, waving in invitations. I wait, say that Julie Lowe invited me. “What’s your name?,” the bouncer asks. I give it, and wait again, turning around to look at the street, transformed with this rare attention. I look up at Culross House, and think of the letters that I had found in a planning department file last week from their tenant association complaining about Julie’s parties. It makes me almost chuckle, relishing the uproar this will cause among the locals. But, of course, I won’t be here to hear it. “Nitin!” Julie calls out, arms wide open, bright red dress on, hair up, “You made it!” I smile, step past the bouncer, give her a hug, and she takes me into the former repair depot. From the looks of it, it has been completely cleaned up from the mess that I saw barely ten days ago. “Go get a drink and walk around I just need to talk to the director of CRASH,” and she is off.
People in blue, orange or black ski jackets with wool pants mill around six or seven of the exhibits. Some of them are balancing holding a bottle of Japanese beer with styrofoam bowls. I look out at the stand where two young attendants spoon out soups from metal tureens with tags that say Wild Mushroom and Sage, Cream of Celery, and Country Chicken. Next to it is a table with folders stuffed with a broadsheet-sized promotional magazine, called, I find out soon enough, Crash Bang Wallop! I ask the jacketed man behind the table who is the organizer and he points out into the crowd of ski jackets and soup bowls to a skinny woman, with barretted long hair, wool pants and an olive-gray ski jacket, trying to look 22, chugging a bottle of Evian. I say thanks and tucking the folder beneath my left arm, I go get a bottle of the Japanese beer and start touring the exhibits.

One of them looks like a polystyrene igloo, which some of the more adventurous climb in and out of. Another is more conceptual, drawings of housing shelter communities having amenities - living rooms, showers, kitchens, libraries - we imagine to be necessary. All the rooms are modular with detachable walls. Some of the exhibits use wood and metal, others plastic; some show the collaborative design process through a series of sketches on panels, others just the final product, an objet d'art supplementing the designer’s short but intense career trajectory depicted in a laminated catalogue that you can flip through.
This I do, as I drink some more beer, look up at the people around me. I wonder why Evian wants to be a sponsor at a ’designers-design-for-the-homeless - and not just any homeless, but the single homeless - event.’ Does Evian need good publicity?

It’s a question I mildly contemplate looking for the toilets. Julie had told me that for their spectacle, Channel Four had built their own, not liking the existing ones. Since Julie had taken out the plumbing, determined to return Battlebridge as close to its original dereliction before January 31st, there must be other arrangements. I get directions and notice the trail of people going outside. I chuckle again; the toilets are inside a trailer. Behind King’s Cross station, in a historic railway quarter on the fringes of central London. One of the ski-jacketed was stepping out. It was all part of the experience, no doubt.

I step back into the light, and someone is passing a microphone to a brown-headed, gray-suited man. Julie will later introduce him to me as the director of CRASH, a charity that raises money from the construction industry for the ’single homeless.’ I would say to them, ”the problem is about land, about the impossibility of getting land to build cheaper housing in central London.” They would nod, and Julie would add, with a third, possibly fifth, gin and something in her hand, ”I know, they’re pigs, land is power...”
The director says how happy he is to be here, and see so many people, and how incredibly difficult it was to decide which was the winning design, since they were all such incredible work by fresh and emerging talent. The director calls the organizer, Phoebe Cunningham or Killingham. She jumps out, sticks her hands up in the air, and starts talking about this being a showcase of some of the best and the brightest in Britain and they should all congratulate themselves. Phoebe then drops her voice and says, "But there has to be a winner." She reads out the name of the team, and I think that it’s the one that imagined an intimate shelter community, with trees, libraries and all. As people clap for the winning team, I stand there, eyebrows raised, wondering whether this was the London I was looking for.

I turn around and head to the bar. "Mixed drink?,” the bartender asks. "Oh,” I say, not seeing any liquor bottles, "Sure, gin and tonic.” "Absolutely,” she replies. She places some ice in a glass and finds the gin, sprays in the tonic and places a lemon on the rim. She hands me the glass. "Are you from one of the design firms here?” I ask, sort of interested, a little bored, calmer now, sipping. "No, no, no, I work as a nanny for one of Phoebe’s friends.” "Oh right,” I say, smiling. Scanning the crowd again, I think of seeing whether there is any soup left, but then see Ray coming out of the igloo. He has got sunglasses on, and a shiny T-shirt, like he was looking for a rave club and found a cocktail
party. "Bye," I say to the bartender, stir my drink once or twice, remove
the straw, and walk towards the igloo.

"Ray, you're here!" I call out, and he says, "Hi Nitin, of course I
am. You know I am interested in arts, culture, media, fashion. You've
seen the exhibits? So, this is going to be the new King's Cross," he blurts
all at once. His eyes are already bloodshot, but then he smokes every
night. I grin and say, "Yeah, a cultural quarter, the Partnership has
thrown money into this," and I show him the sponsorship letter printed at
the back page of the exposition catalogue. "Apparently they've sent the
two Steves as sales reps," I say, gesturing to Ray. We walk over, past a
decidedly older couple, the woman actually wearing a fur stole, the man
a tuxedo, past the wood and metal shelter to the two Steves, one a
Chamberlain the other a McNulty.

Julie had beat us to it, and was in the midst of telling them about
one of her latest battles with the board of the freight corporation or
maybe the planning department - "They are all freemasons," she was
exclaiming. Steve McNulty sees us approach, nods, and I say hello. Julie
introduces us. I've seen them at the "public" consultation meeting the
Partnership had held to gauge local support for a community
development trust. The idea is that when the Partnership exhausted its
seven-year tenure it could gracefully still chant community by selling
itself one of King’s Cross’ rundown industrial buildings and reorganizing itself as a community development trust. The consultation had been in the front room of the St. Pancras Chambers, the former hotel attached to the railway station. Despite the faded and peeling paint, it had an irrepressible grandeur, for which good biscuits had been served and strong coffee brewed. For many of the locals, however, it soon became a sham lure. They had soon caught on that they were being snowed, despite, or perhaps because of their “community” representatives who were busy running at the mouth where this half-million and that 1.2 million were being spent.

Steve M, a friend in Urban Studies at Goldsmiths and part-time administrative worker for Voluntary Action Camden, upstairs from KXRLG’s cubby hole would tell me six months later, is the partner of a famous sexuality theorist. But on this evening in November, I merely answer his question about how my exhibition is going. I try to put on a steely grin to convey enthusiasm for a project that I won’t see to completion.

“I really wanted it to be a vehicle to re-energize the Railway Lands Group and to publicize their work,” I say. “Their earlier stuff, the alternative planning applications, the interim uses, I mean, it was incredible. They calculated how much office space was necessary to subsidize council housing, they went out there to actually talk to people
during the Planning for Real exercises, and that doesn’t happen anymore.” I pause to drink, he nods, I continue. “I’ve been having some talks with Tim Brown at Raw Material, and Emma Kay at Cubitt.² They’ve both been at King’s Cross for years, and they are members of Railway Lands,³ they care about community and local planning, but Railway Lands has no idea what they are up to.” “Yeah, yeah, we’ve been trying to help Cubitt fund a project,” Steve M offers. I don’t mention that Tim told me that the Partnership has basically ignored Raw Material’s work of training inner city youth for jobs in the film and music industry that would do wonders for the ‘Meeting Outputs’ column on their ‘Evaluating Community Chest Funds’⁴ spreadsheet. Instead I say, “I wanted more input from the tenant associations, to personalize all this change that is happening.”

I look across the two Steves, and to Ray and Julie, who are now talking to the CRASH director, laughing. I gaze at the scene in the room, the crowd of ski vests somewhat thinner, the glamorized soup kitchen shut down for the night. I try to recall what I have left to pack before I catch my flight tomorrow for Toronto. As I focus back, I catch Julie’s eyes, and she gestures me towards herself and the director. She introduces me, we shake hands and he asks me what I do. I tell him I’ve been looking at King’s Cross and Spitalfields, about community development and strategies for economic growth in former industrial
inner city areas. He nods and hands me his card. I take it and think how the management committee members should be doing this, mingling, campaigning. But it is not their style. It is Julie’s. And maybe mine.

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1 “Making money in the muck” is a spin on a line from My Beautiful Laundrette, written by Hanif Kureishi and directed by Stephen Frears. Nasser, Omar’s uncle and owner of a string of inner-city South London businesses, including the laundrette, shouts to Omar, the protagonist of the film, “Take my advice. There’s money in muck.” See Kureishi (1986): 63. The quote that follows the title is from Virginia Woolf’s novel, Between the Acts (1992) [1941]: 60.

2 As we will see in Chapter Six, Raw Material is a multi-media educational charity that trains inner-city, predominantly Black British youth in music, video and film production. Cubitt Gallery is a collectively-run artist space that includes an exhibition gallery. Both are signs of the nascent cultural sector at King’s Cross.

3 Railway Lands is a familiar locally-understood short form for the King’s Cross Railway Lands Group.

4 The Community Chest Fund gives grants in the range of $2,500 to local groups to support community initiatives in the King’s Cross – SRB area. Its budget, at around £1.5 million, pales in comparison to the more than £30 million that the Partnership would spend on average annually.
The intimate solidity of the European city, the monuments and traces of which are littered in King's Cross and Spitalfields, has been displaced as the predominant global urban form. In its place is the emblematic heterogeneity and polynucleity of a Los Angeles, with its de-industrialized manufacturing pockets, re-industrialized zones of the petroleum and aerospace industries, and its suburbs, where senses of place are defined by gated neighborhoods and Edge Cityscapes, the financial and retail services that overshadow the Downtown and inner city (Davis 1990; Garreau 1991; Soja 1989). You can find this multifocal urban form -- and it begs the question, what will 'urban' point to in the twenty-first century? -- not just on the American West Coast, or in Houston, where I write, but in newer boom metropolises such as the Shenzhen Special Economic Development Zone and the new Malaysian 'Multimedia Supercorridor.'
Throughout this dissertation, I have asked about urban space in the global city where de-industrialization has left a pockmarked and derelict landscape that is still well inhabited and where everyday life and space are threatened by footloose financial capital. Rather than paint another grim picture, however, I have assembled a range of animated discussions that display the extent and complexity of urbanist agency in King’s Cross and Spitalfields. As exceptional places rich with architectural heritage, economic and cultural diversity, they command strong, if varying, amounts of appreciation and dedication by conservationists, community planning activists and directors of development trusts alike. I have attempted to show how this strength of feeling and commitment among urbanist agents is made possible by linkages of communication and cooperation through which senses of community are produced.

In this last chapter, we face the predicament of an increasingly aestheticist everyday life that I invoked in Chapters One and Two, in which the reclaimed past is a vehicle to repackage the urban landscape for an imagined tourist gaze. This can, and often does produce a landscape of upscale consumption in numerous urban districts that have experienced preservation, revitalization and community mobilization. However, as I discuss in this concluding chapter, it can also support the explosive growth of the cultural industries in reclaimed inner city spaces, which a number of urban analysts are being to notice (e.g., Bianchini and Parkinson, ed., 1993; Landry and Bianchini 1995, Santacatterina 1995). I’ll begin with Christine Boyer’s necessarily ironic overview of the creation of the cultural quarter.
Boyer describes, how, from the late 1960s, with the sounds and stench of industrial culture vanquished, dilapidated and empty factories and warehouses in rail yards and along wharves that have survived the slash and burn urge of development of the 1950s and 1960s become to be re-valued. This process of recycling a "leftover ‘working’ district" begins with, Boyer somewhat snidely remarks, "pioneers with arts-and-crafts appearance" (1994: 425). Then the more upmarket, trendier merchants arrive, who "rehabilitate and refurbish in grander style." This initiates a chain effect, with rents jumping and the middle class coming in. "Federal, state, and local monies were advanced...cultural centers were built, special regulatory zoning and historic districts status was granted...and guided tours developed." The whole process transforms the once industrial area into a spectacle for the tourist gaze.

What happens in these inner-city districts is, of course, a reflection of larger transformations effecting advanced industrial nations in the North. With the growing strength of transnational corporations, the shift of manufacturing to cheaper labor in Central America, and the rise of newly industrial countries of East and Southeast Asia, the inner city industrial areas of Liverpool and Newcastle, Philadelphia and Baltimore are made redundant. Yet, this loss is checked by expansions in the services sector, led by financial firms that mobilize new computer and media technologies to co-ordinate the escalating flows of capital in one of the handful of global cities (Sassen 1991). In this league, despite national economic decline relative to other European and Asian countries, is London.

How can we begin to weave a narrative of this process at King’s Cross and Spitalfields? That is, how can we specify a set of practices that transform a
residual industrial district into an active and attractive cultural one? How do we explain this transformation, both physical and conceptual, at the level of municipal urban planning policy, since, as I have noted in Chapters Three, Four and Five, it is such agencies, along with non-profit community development trusts and regeneration companies, that envision their areas as cultural quarters? One point of entry is the attention to the local environment that conservation legislation in the late 1960s facilitated. The other – more of an effect than a cause – is a fictional account of Asian Underground Nite at the Bluenote, a club formerly in Hoxton, itself a formerly industrial, working-class area now recognized as one of London’s newest cultural quarters. Against the aestheticism of conservation I described in Chapter Two and in Chapter Four in the context of Spitalfields, the story attempts a staging of another kind of aesthetic experience that is part and parcel of the repackaged inner city.

The 1968 Civic Amenities Act institutionalized the notion of the conservation area. The practice of designating buildings of special historic and architectural importance and putting them on a statutory list had started some twenty years earlier. This safeguarded the building, but not the area around it. The idea behind the conservation area was to recognize the significance of a neighborhood’s character as worthy of protection. There would be some listed buildings, but other buildings and features could contribute to the area’s historical interest that would together form the conservation area.

How such areas were designated was generally up to the local borough’s conservation officer. This devolution of conservation practice to the municipal
level encouraged the growth of borough-level amenity societies, such as the Islington Society, the Hackney Society, and the Camden Civic Society. Made up of locally residing historians, architects, and amateur conservationists, these voluntary societies became the key public consultees involved in determining conservation areas. Some of their members sat on the borough's planning and development sub-committees, others wrote pamphlets for newcomers and enthusiasts about the architectural history of their neighborhoods (e.g., for Hackney see Hunter 1986). In this way, they formed a local public that articulated a growing pride in neighborhood architectural heritage, thus developing a historically informed sense of place.

The growth of local amenity societies and the formation of conservation areas were symptomatic of national phenomena: most specifically, as I discussed in Chapter Two, a burgeoning public interested in all sorts of heritage, and the gentrification of formerly working class, inner-city neighborhoods in London. Islington, former home of then leader of the Labour Party (now Prime Minister) Tony Blair, is perhaps the most pronounced example. Here, especially in its southern section of Clerkenwell, and central areas of Barnsbury and Canonbury, gentrification and conservation were (and are) coupled in an increasingly notable class-differentiated politics of place in an area that was staunchly working-class as late as the 1970s (Lees 1994; Pitt 1977; Raban 1977). For Patrick Wright (1985, 1991) this reveals how preservation politics is tied to "deep England," a certain notion of everyday life that resonates to English upper middle class subjectivity.2 Additionally, Alan Powers's (1998) description of how conservation in the late 1970s and 1980s animated a notion of the "urban pastoral" suggests that
conservation, as a national cultural politics, brought Deep England to bear on the inner city.

At King’s Cross, conservationists articulated notions of memory and place, delving into histories of buildings and areas threatened by the first proposals for the CTRL. Their conservation activism invested the industrial heritage of the Railway Lands with a gritty, but nonetheless unique sense of place that should not be lost. In this sense, if no other, conservation was able to feed into the grassroots, working-class politics of land use that, led by the King’s Cross Railway Lands Group, opposed the CTRL and its attendant office development. At Spitalfields, conservationists focused on saving actual remaining buildings, rather than arguing for the preservation of the urban landscape. Although they would gradually enlarge their notion of Spitalfields, conservation for the members and supporters of the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust was rehabilitating and refurbishing eighteenth-century houses as single family homes.

Nonetheless, despite their concern for the welfare of the local environment, conservation was still about a certain kind of connoisseurship and agency that did not consider the diverse lives of the two quarters. It was effectively cut off from the diasporic living and working arrangements of London’s Bangladeshi community, anchored in the Spitalfields ward of Tower Hamlets and the largest minority community in the four political wards that make up the King’s Cross area. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Spitalfields’s Georgian row houses and street patterns, its turn of the century townscales, its interwar housing estates, were being re-inscribed with Bangladeshi diasporic life. Brick Lane, Spitalfields’s
shopping and business street was becoming the site of “Banglatown” (Jacobs 1996; Parkes 1995).

In the era of multiculturalism, the notions of culture that “Banglatown” mobilizes are understandable to anthropologists and the general urban public alike. Moreover, the inscription of “Banglatown” points to the spatial dimension of culture – and at which I can only hint here – whereby a newer cultural group inhabits the old urban fabric. So, for example, the silk weaver houses of the French Huguenots were re-used as garment industry workshops for local Bangladeshis, and the synagogue on Fournier Street became the London Jammi Mosque. In Brick Lane, countless stores have become shops selling sweets and saris, and a strip north of Hanbury Street functions as a mini restaurant district. Interestingly, that many of these buildings are listed, or part of Spitalfields’s conservation areas, reinforces where the interests between conservationists and diasporic politicians or entrepreneurs collide. Both are cultural practices that inscribe themselves onto objects (building facades, street lamps, shop interiors) in urban space. It is amidst the spatialization of cultural practices – whether those of Deep England conservationists or diasporic Bangladeshis, in which culture becomes a strategic discourse that can be mobilized in the name of regeneration. To see this in action, I move from Spitalfields back to King’s Cross to look at the ad the King’s Cross Partnership placed on the back page of the 1998 Crash! Bang! Wallop! Exhibition that I mentioned in the previous chapter:
King's Cross Partnership
creating a 'New Cultural Quarter for London'.

The idea that King's Cross could be transformed into a vibrant and distinctive part of London is a reality in the making. The potential of this area is seemingly boundless. Supporting 'Crash Bang Wallop!' provides the King's Cross Partnership with another real opportunity to raise the profile and to reinforce the growing energy of the local arts scene.

The Partnership was formed in 1996 to co-ordinate effort and provide the strategic framework for the regeneration of the two square kilometres centred on King's Cross and St Pancras stations. It brings together a broad range of private sector interests, the local community and public sector including the two local authorities, Camden and Islington.

Using Government Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding of £37.5 million and with a total investment of over £250 million anticipated over the life of the programme, the vision is to transform King's Cross into a 'New Cultural Quarter for London'.

We are conscious that among the area's most distinctive assets are its artistic and cultural life and traditions. Cultural development is crucial to the success of any regeneration programme. There is no doubt that it assists local people in developing a sense of personal value and esteem, whilst cultural industries are an important local employer and play a key role in encouraging and securing inward investment.

The King's Cross Partnership is currently supporting a number of innovative schemes, of all sizes, targeting the development of the arts.

Projects range from a community fountain designed by a local resident, funding of over £750,000 secured to assist in redevelopment of The Place, one of the world's leading centres for contemporary dance, to initiatives such as resources to provide a sign board for the local Cubitt artists and the redevelopment of the former Scala cinema. This key landmark building, once completed, will form another major impetus for the regeneration of the area. The Scala will provide a range of exciting facilities including a cinema, an art gallery, two bar / restaurants, seminar space and a night club / music venue.

King's Cross has an identity based on a series of assets which have been here for over one hundred years: St Pancras Chambers, the canal, the gas holders and perhaps most importantly people and lots of them. Our aim is to link the diverse local and global cultures and to strengthen the personality of the area. What better way to do it than through all things fun!!

King's Cross
PARTNERSHIP

(Image 29)
In paragraphs 3 and 4, the Partnership outlines the enormous amount of funding it is in charge of outlaying – more than £275 million ($440 million) – over seven years, and are explicit in its intention to transform the old, industrial inner city railway landscape into the newest cultural quarter. The Partnership goes on to describe the projects it is supporting, which include major funding for The Place, a leading contemporary dance center, “a community fountain designed by a local resident,” and a “sign board for the local Cubitt [sic] artists.” Given the kind of resources available to the Partnership and its sheer prominence in the local regeneration scene, this random laundry list of initiatives suggests a makeshift cultural policy at best. Yet the regeneration of the inner city as a cultural quarter, effectively linking cultural policy with the promotion of culture as industry, has been well-conceived and implemented with good success in Sheffield and Dublin.

At Sheffield, initiatives began in 1980 out of a government economic development policy that sought to meet the employment and training needs of young people through cultural industries, such as music, film, video, radio, television, design, photography, and the performing arts (Oatley 1996: 172). Near Sheffield’s city center, the City Council began a program of re-using derelict land and buildings, doing physical improvements, and most importantly, nurturing its “existing pool of innovative young and creative microcompanies with potential; [its] track record of successful city artists; [and] links to a UK growth sector with access world markets.” The City’s Cultural Industry Quarter now supports some 125 businesses, with an emphasis on media production, and has moved from launching the first municipal recording studio, Red Tape, in 1986 to developing
film, photographic, music initiatives that are actively engage the globalized
circuits of cultural production and consumption (passim, 173-175).

Planner John Montgomery (1995) describes the case of Temple Bar in
Dublin, where he was commissioned to advise on a pilot project to build a cultural
quarter with a £3.6 million in ERDF funding and a £25 million loan backed by the
Irish government. Again, nascent cultural enterprises, thirty-odd in 1991 at
Temple Bar, were nurtured along with an ambitious urban design scheme to
develop further businesses, including a thriving night-time economy, a mixture of
residential, retail and cultural uses, and to deploy urban design principles that
nurtured Temple Bar’s intimate scale. As in Sheffield, the public sector was the
lead agency, facilitating and nurturing private sector investment. At Temple Bar,
two state-owned companies were established, one to serve as a developer (Temple
Bar Properties Ltd.), the other to manage urban revitalization (Temple Bar
Renewal) (passim, 154-165).

At King’s Cross, such well-focused strategies are totally lacking.
Nonetheless, if you look carefully and diligently, you can find interesting cultural
activities emerging in the shadows of St Pancras and King’s Cross, such as the
music and media charity, Raw Material, and Cubitt Gallery, an artist’s collective
and alternative exhibition space. The narratives of their emergence retain an
activist sense of cultural production formed in the era of Thatcherism. This, as I
think the conversations show, linger, despite being incorporated as a technique in
creating a cultural quarter.
AN EMERGING CULTURAL QUARTER AT KING’S CROSS: RAW MATERIAL AND CUBITT GALLERY

In the south end of the first floor of the former Coal Drops, now known as Bagley’s Warehouse, the eponym for one of London’s notorious and largest rave clubs, is a set of media enterprises. One firm makes corporate videos, specializing in health care. Another, World Video, among the first to use video to record London’s emergent fashion scene in the late 1970s (and with apparently the world’s largest private fashion video archive), makes fashion shows (“Planet Fashion”) for lucrative cable television market overseas. However, the most interesting is Raw Material, a music and media charity running at Bagley’s for about 8 years.

Raw Material provides inner city youth lacking standard vocational qualifications training in music and video recording, production, and editing. As an educational charity, it provides young people with access and opportunity in the music and other media industries. Training programs last for 2 years, during which time students learn to develop how to write and produce their own projects. In addition, graduates of the program are required to tutor new trainees. Interestingly, much of the funding comes from the European Social Fund, and has been used to develop various kinds of projects which link students with music programs abroad, especially in West and South Africa.

Other funding helps support the high quality equipment at Raw Material: there’s a vocal room, three editing suites, including one with the latest AVID system, and two pre-recording studios. The atmosphere of access to a professional studio, as well as the potential to develop their own creativity, has proven
successful for Raw Material, many of whom go onto university or jobs in the industry. As a charity, it occupies an increasingly prominent niche. It often gets contracts as consultants to help develop arts programs in British schools. When I visited in mid-September and early October 1998, works that were being edited included a screenwriting project about kids in East London and the linked politics of hair and adolescence, and a video project on racism and youth for the Camden Race Equality Council.

I first met the director of Raw Material, Tim Brown, through Tony Askew, who runs World Video and other commercial creative enterprises at Bagley’s. It was part of my tour of the premises. Raw Material used to be a member of the King’s Cross Railway Lands Group, so I knew they were more sensitive to larger redevelopment issues than was Askew, who had little time for the group. So, on the first of October, I came back to talk to Tim, in a short-ceilinged office on one end of Bagley’s, with a small window out of which you could peer out at the Coal and Fish Offices.

We began talking about Raw Material’s latest project, called Backtrack. Backtrack receives half its funding from the London Arts Board, and the other half from City of Westminster. It would involve training twenty people, ten at a time. The first ten would all be from Westminster; the second ten would have five from Westminster, and the rest from the London region. Backtrack, Tim tells me, “is an example of subsidizing and giving young people bursaries to develop professional skills in a creative context.” Most of the students have a strong interest in music production and DJ-ing, but lack a traditional music education, even keyboard
skills. So, Raw Material, as it names suggests, develops the skills of its students and trains them on industry standard equipment. In addition, it creates programs such as Backtrack, where they will get “twenty hours of top quality studio time with an engineer and a programmer who’ll work with them on a creative level.”

Raw Material also runs courses funded by the European Social Fund – “You know, very structured, ten or fifteen-week programs, which take you through a process, and you get a certificate at the end of it, and you then get a job. Everyone, who has done those courses, I’d say sixty to seventy percent have all got jobs in the industry.” Students from “Inner London, no privilege” occasionally even get “jobs in America” or go to university, and Tim believes that “somewhere along the line it is working for them.”

As a charity, Raw Material endeavors to provide access and opportunity for disadvantage people. “What does disadvantaged mean?” I asked. Tim replies:

Economically socially excluded. Perhaps lacking in equality of opportunity due to race issues, because they are black, because they’re working class Asian, because they may be disabled, physically disabled or learning difficulties, they maybe refugees. We don’t touch too much refugee work at the moment or work with the disabled partly because we don’t have access here. But we have run several disabled projects and have made modifications to the buildings but on the whole we aren’t allowed anymore. We were told we can’t carry people up the stairs, and we can’t afford to fundraise £20,000 for a stair lift.

Part of the success Brown attributes to Raw Material is because of the significance of music recording to British industry. Culture Secretary Chris Smith (1998) cites figures from the National Music Council and the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) suggesting that in 1995, around 100,000 people were employed in music full-time, with some 70,000 employed part-time. In addition, music
contributed to Britain’s balance of payments more than the steel industry, and
that, “one in five recordings sold worldwide has a British component, be it the
artists, the composer or the recording company” (11). That Britain, despite relative
economic decline, ranks second after the US in music exports further highlights the
significance of music as not only a career, but also a nationally significant
enterprise. For disadvantaged, inner city youth, music offers a medium to develop
skills that enhance cultural identities and practices as well as provide incredible
opportunities. Raw Material is training people for an industry that works very well
in Britain.

However, Raw Material’s incorporation into the growth of the
cultural sector has been an elaboration of a process begun, interestingly
enough, in a classroom. Tim was a lecturer for ten years, from 1980 to
1990, at the Cockpit Theatre, a specialized arts education center designed to
“provide educational models within both the statutory education sector and
community education” and run by the former Inner London Education
Authority in Marylebone, west London. Many of Raw Material’s first
students and subsequent project managers got started at the Cockpit. Tim
explains the environment:

I taught. I ran [the Cockpit]. I was part of a team, but I was also like a link
worker to the community. In fact Raw Material was set up while I was still
there because we did some mini-projects… We went to Hamburg and did a
whole race relations seminar and live shows. There was…an exciting
dynamic for young people and I worked with Anselm [Raw Material’s
projects director] because I was during that time a teacher-fellow at the
[University of London’s] Institute of Education, that was funded by ILEA.
And, I was able to research the links between institutions like the Cockpit
Theatre, the people who worked in them, and the needs of the local
community, and out of that came the need for Raw Material. That was my
project. What I actually did at university was produce a film called *Hard as
Hell* which was about people growing up in what, ghettos really, big
housing estates. We wrote a script about that for Channel 4 and it was shortlisted. We were going to get £150,000 to make a film, but unfortunately at the last minute the funding fell through...When the Cockpit Theatre was closed down and became taken over by Westminster’s College, I became a photography lecturer. But I was made redundant a year later, they gave me a fat payoff and I was able to take off six months. My wife’s company, TV-AM, gave us an office in Camden.

The office, plus a £15,000 grant from Westminster Council to assess and develop the musical “needs of the borough,” allowed Tim and his Cockpit students to buy equipment – which they still have -- and launch Raw Material. The loss of his lectureship forced Tim to re-assess what his own interests were. He says, “I had this quite privileged position of knowing a lot of young, interesting young people who were DJs, musicians, video makers, community minded people, and they were nearly, yeah, 100% Afro-Caribbean.” But, Tim is also self-critical of a white Englishman directing a charity in which all the beneficiaries are inner-city Black British. He explains:

T: I wasn’t going to put myself out as a kind of like hip-hop expert, you know what I mean?...On the other hand, I have credibility because people would look and knew me and knew what I supported and they knew my heart was in what I was trying to do, so you got respect. And then you just need the right team around you. We often talk about it, what is the face of Raw Material, is it this white guy? My proposal to the younger members is ‘You become what I am, and I’ll fix money deals and stuff like that, but you’ll run the thing and be artistic director. It’s your thing to run, it’s your baby. I’ve enabled a certain process to take place, collaboration.’ Otherwise, you might be blocking the way. It might stay like this [shows me a picture of a white South African soldier commanding Black troops]. It is always lurking there.

Born out of, in part, a response to the racism of the 1970s and 1980s, Raw Material developed within the volatile and violent anxiety of a Britain that was increasingly become diasporic and multicultural. Indeed, Brown’s citing of cultural studies as part of the curriculum at the Cockpit indicates an already developing fluency in the politicization of cultural acts and identities. Organizing
as a charity allowed Raw Material to extend its aims in cultural pedagogy into preparing its students for creative entrepreneurship and industry. This is underscored by its recent setting up of a trading wing – and here, they resemble the SSBA – called Rawkus Productions. Raw Material is the main shareholder, but its graduates direct Rawkus, and which is now producing and manufacturing CDs under its own label.

With their offices in Bagley’s Warehouse in the Railway Lands, Raw Material isn’t part of the usual King’s Cross seen by the commuter changing trains. More visible is Cubitt Gallery, in the “Laundry” Building on Caledonia Street across the long flank of King’s Cross station and two blocks from the intersection of Euston, Pentonville, and Gray’s Inn Road, all major London routes.

I’d been trying for months to meet with Emma Kay, who had got one of KXRLG’s glossy newsletters and filled out and returned the membership slip. Finally, on November 12th, at 4 pm, I meet Emma at the Gallery, where we spoke for about an hour and a quarter. Emma begins with giving me a tour of the three story building, showing me what some of the studios looked like, and then taking me down to the exhibition space itself in the basement, where we did most of our talking. Responding to my questions, she gives me the story about Cubitt, its political and artistic practices, as well as at its ongoing relationship with the local council, Islington, and the King’s Cross Partnership.

Emma places Cubitt within a tradition of the artist as inner-city squatter, moving in and doing what she called “culturally-led regeneration.” She talks about
the discovery of artists in East End warehouses in the late 1980s, at a time when
the GLC (and its concomitant strong arts policy) had been abolished, and national
arts funding had declined. Now, she says, the whole artist scene is an export-
commodity, but then, “unknown artists couldn’t get gallery showings so they
started to hold temporary exhibitions in their occupied warehouses.”

Cubitt was one such band of artists, consisting of twelve art college kids who
had graduated together and were looking for a place. They found an industrial
building on Goodsway, which is a busy access route through the Railway Lands.
At that time, 1990, British Rail wanted everyone out because of the first plans for a
CTRL terminus at King’s Cross. However, they got enough compensation to look
for another building, and found one on Cubitt Street, from where they took their
name. There, they set up exhibitions in a central common space and built studios
first for twenty-four and then thirty-two people. It was where they began to get
noticed. However, the Cubitt Street building was slated to become housing, and so
they had to move again, this time to Caledonia Street, in 1995. Known locally as
the “Laundry Building,” it was a former sweatshop. “There were sewing machines
still there when we arrived,” says Emma.

In terms of its organization, Cubitt is a charity, whose constitution stipulates
that each artist has to work two days a week in the gallery. The gallery’s programs
are separately run and funded through grants. Artists pay rent for the studios, and
maintain other kinds of jobs, mainly as teachers at art schools. Emma is part of
volunteer-run committees that manage the gallery and the studio spaces. No one
draws a salary from Cubitt itself. For her, this is a matter of principle, to prevent,
for example, a distancing from something like a paid director and the artists themselves. They don’t show their work in the gallery space and no art is sold.

At the time of my visit, Cubitt was looking for another place. Their owner, P & O, a large property and transport conglomerate, was kicking them out, as part of their plans for the redevelopment of the area. A supermarket, rumored to be Tesco, is slated to be built across the way. The concession to the arts – as well as a business strategy – is to have studios and workspaces for architects and designers in the small, concealed courtyard one block south. Interestingly, NFC had approached Cubitt to look at the Coal and Fish. NFC, Emma describes, evidently aware of its poor public image “were interested in an arts group with a public face and ‘thought we were it’.” Cubitt thought they weren’t, and that they “couldn’t have the public tramping in all the time and [that] there is no space for a gallery and it is inconvenient,” in terms of transportation.

In terms of the King’s Cross Partnership, Emma mentions that they have had some talks with Joan Toovey, the Chief Executive, and that the Partnership are finally developing an arts policy, and had given, £500 for their billboard and something like a £1000 for their neon sign. This is just peanuts compared to the funding needed for the gallery’s current project in the pipeline, Urban Islands, which would bring together the work of three artists to Cubitt. This will include an American who makes accurate architectural models of an urban site and then re-inscribes it as an eco-activist community, a French artist commenting on cities becoming theme parks, and a local artist whose used aerial photography and computer imaging to re-imagine communities. A smaller project, an installation at a former restaurant on nearby Caledonian Road, was getting a lot of support from
Islington Planning’s department Graham Harrington and Mike Bruce in terms of securing temporary use of the restaurant.

The artistic politics of Cubitt differ widely from that of Raw Material, and this has consequences for how both entities, non-profit in organization, understand their location within the expanding cultural sector. Part of this difference is a result of the ways in which Cubitt’s main enterprise, visual art, and that of Raw Material, music and video, function as industries in Britain as well as internationally. Moreover, their politics are shaped by the aim of their organization. At Cubitt, the artists form a collective, to help subsidize rent costs (through economies of scale), to participate in the art industry (through association with an independent gallery), and to work in a community of artists. At Raw Material, the goal is more educational: providing music and video production skills, exposure to professional studio techniques, and the competence to get jobs in the industry for disadvantaged, inner city youth. Rather than organizing itself as a collective, Raw Material functions as a charity that has formed a separate trading wing, Rawkus Productions. Both mitigate their complete absorption into the market by the governing principles of their organizations. So, Cubitt doesn’t sell art. By comparison, Raw Material presents an opportunity to combine the cultural experience of disadvantage with marketable skills, but with the first factor being shaped into the second; that is what makes it different than ordinary musical or media training programs.

Both subscribe to notions of community that have, to date, little or no relationship to the existing living communities at King’s Cross, the constituents,
for example, of King’s Cross Railway Lands Group. Cubitt, due to fire regulations, is unable to invite large amounts of the public in their building on Caledonia Street. Yet, they also resist being thought of as a local arts agency. Rather, they see themselves as the only artists’ collective at King’s Cross. Raw Material maintains ties with Marylebone and Westminster youth, inner-city locales on the other side of Regent’s Park, well into west London. Their support, like that of Cubitt, tends to come from agencies outside the local authority, and so they have no genuine reason to focus their artistic work on the King’s Cross community.

This, however, doesn’t mean that they have no effect on the transformation of the local urban landscape of King’s Cross, from its revaluation as the industrial Railway Lands to a cultural quarter. The relative successes of Cubitt and Raw Material reveal the potential of small-scale cultural industries to thrive at King’s Cross. Both compete not for local recognition, but for a London-wide, European, and global reputation. King’s Cross, with its transport links, its availability of cheap premises, its aura of monumental architecture and industry, its association with prostitution, drugs, and raves – hence, the gritty side of metropolitan life -- provides unusual cachet.

In fact, it is this understanding of King’s Cross’s leftover spaces, which Cubitt, especially, but in a sense, Raw Material – whose sharing of an address with one of London’s largest clubs can’t be bad for publicity – that allow innovative cultural practices to flourish at King’s Cross. Yet how do these cultural industry uses, which incidentally also include the several redeveloped blocks just north of Cubitt around Battlebridge Basin, affect the possibility of other kinds of uses, and
their value? Moreover, at King’s Cross, the cultural quarter is nascent. To see it growing up, we need to head to Hoxton and then south and east to Spitalfields.

REPACKAGING THE EAST END

Tushar knows he should have left earlier to meet friends at Hoxton by half-nine. With his trench coat flapping in a still cool, late March breeze, his blue suede loafers that had withstood far too many nightly darts to the bus stop, Tushar speeds through the narrow streets lined with short, gaudily-painted terraces. It is a part of Hackney which the people, like himself, who lived near, shopped or owned businesses on Stoke Newington Church Street, a veritable mini Upper Street, would disavow as Stoke Newington. It is here, in fact, where the two-room-wide, four-story-tall terraces of North London give way to the two-room-wide, two-story-ones of East London. So, Tushar, on the last Monday in March in 1998, runs through not-quite Stoke Newington toward the Kingsland Road.

There are a few saunterers and stragglers still on Kingsland Road when he arrives, across from one of the street’s Turkish bakeries. He looks left and sees lights, but can’t make out whether one of the buses he needs to take him near Hoxton by Old Street - the 149, 243 or 76, is on its way. He crosses the street, and heads south on this Roman road,
passing the callbox to the bus stop in front of the broad expanse of the Turkish Cypriot Community Centre.

Tushar is full of anticipation mixed with dread. He resents his dependence on Parul for such invitations to go out and yet cannot refuse. This ambivalence, he at the very least knows, is a product of the past month’s (although if you really want to know, it goes back to November) hot and cold, love-hate tempo of their rendezvous.

He focuses on the incoming vehicle, and sees that it is the 149. ‘Great,’ he mutters, and waits for the driver to stop and open the doors. Tushar sits on top of the new style double-decker, more rectangular, wider, the metal replaced by plastic. Tushar puts away the notebook, and looks out the window. Shops wearing their nightclothes, corrugated metal strewn with graffiti, line the street. The parking lot where the noisy Ridley Road fruit and vegetable market will open tomorrow morning and the aqua blue and pink façade of the Dalston Town Centre is an albatross among the crows.

Shops give way to terraces and housing estates as the bus approaches an expanse of open sky by the Regent’s Canal that cuts its way through London’s midriff. The streetscape returns, but with tighter, more ornate buildings huddling around fifties’ factories and warehouses, a residual industrial district. Near Old Street, Tushar rings the bell and gets ready to stand, walks down the stairs, the trench coat trailing.
If you approach Hoxton Square at night, as most of the people who find themselves here on Monday are wont to do, you may not care to wonder to where this London square of a forlorn part of N1 has disappeared. Tushar, for one, stands there, amidst the parked cars, and makes out only distinguishable flank of buildings. Absent are the short, soft grass and foot-made pathways of the squares of Bloomsbury. Tushar looks around him, hears the clip of heels and the swing of coats against the small breeze of the March night, as he, along with they, make towards the bright blue doors.

Inside, with his right hand in the coat pocket, his left arm leaning onto the counter, Tushar says, "Tushar Ghatge, Parul put me on the guest list." "Tushar," she says, savoring its strangeness and says, "Yeah, here you are." She gestures him in, already smiling at the next person who is getting out his wallet. Hand still in pocket, Tushar peeks into the front room. The sound is frenetic, bouncing around a blue room, mirrors on one side. The bar is small, but crowded. At one end, a woman, who, as mainstream magazines celebrate, is making the Brown the new Black, is luring people to get on the e-mailing list. Tushar decides to check his coat, smiles at the check-in person and puts the coat ticket in his pocket.

When he returns, Parul is there talking with Tariq, Sunita and two others. He goes to the bar and orders a Cape Cod, for which you have to ask, if you were wondering, for vodka and cranberry juice. Ocean Spray is forever launching its products at Sainsbury’s, but if you go to Waitrose, on the Holloway road, or if you are boutique browsing and stumble into
the branch on the King's Road, you can sample Wensleydale with cranberries. Hybrid cheese? But then aren't most cheeses, hybrids of cultures?

Parul approaches him and says, "Hey, how are you?" Tushar thanks the waiter, and turns to her, stirring his drink and gulping half of it quickly. He follows Parul, greets Tariq and Sunita, saying that it is great seeing them again, and moves aside to be introduced to Milind and Jaideep. While Parul, Tariq and Sunita discuss whether Sophia is coming tonight, Milind asks Tushar how he knows Parul. Tushar smiles, wondering how to tell the story. He settles on, "I'm an ethnographer like she is, also doing dissertation fieldwork here. We met at a conference at SOAS last October." Milind smiles, nods. They are both wearing jackets, and Milind asks the inevitable, 'what do you do?' Tushar responds with the usual reckless stringing of words - historic conservation, urban regeneration, community development in two inner city areas; King's Cross, where the Channel Tunnel Rail Link is coming in. "You know," Tushar pauses, sipping his drink, "a whole industrial railway landscape under threat by major development." Tushar returns the question and learns that Jaideep is a colleague of Milind's at the London offices of a global management company. Jaideep grew up in a section of Pune, India not that far from some of Tushar' own relatives, and perhaps even Milind's. Parul comes back and says, "we're checking out the dance floor."
Past the crimson-painted hallway in which a couple of people under bright white light in a set of stairs that go into a large space, not quite a cavern, filled with dancing bodies. The music sounds like fusion, but then, Tushar is not the best judge. It appeals, apparently, not only to the black-haired, black-clothed Asians but also men in silk kurtas, women in recycled sari blouses of their mothers. They find some space together, but as the fusion is followed by a strong, reworked drum ‘n’ bass to the drawn out beats and lyrical voice-overs that has made ‘Asian Underground’ the newest music scene in Britain. It is, Tushar thinks, as he moved, with an overstated narrowness and exaggerated shoulder movements, where you would have to look if you wanted diasporic South Asian re-inscriptions of London space beyond the corner news shop and the curry house. It was the Asian Underground that made complex, or at least diverse, the Cool Britannia hype that it accompanied the bylines of broadsheets and music industry rags last year.

Parul had disappeared, as had Milind and Jaideep, but Tariq and Sunita were still there. Tushar smirks when he sees Sophia’s characteristic curvy steps on the elevated platform on one side of the floor. All of this, Tushar thinks, closing his eyes, slowing down with the vocal-less beat of the electrified tabla, makes up for the last couple of bad Tuesday nights at bhangra night at Limelight, at Leicester Square. Now, watching Tariq and Sunita in their own exclusive rhythm, Tushar wonders where Parul has gone to, starts scanning the floor and tells Tariq and Sunita that he’ll be back.
If you live in Stoke Newington, like Tushar does during his fieldwork in London, you come to Hoxton Square on the 149, 243 or 76 down the Kingsland Road. However, if you are Shobhna Joshi, spending four weeks in London, en route from Bombay where much of her family still lives, and on to New York, where her life is, then coming to Hoxton is itself a trip. In London, Shobhna stays with a friend who is doing an M.Phil. in Economics at Cambridge but lives in Earl’s Court, that neighborhood well used by touring Australians, Americans, and Canadians. During her visit, Shobhna has had numerous opportunities to sample the hot London music scene. In e-mails to friends in New York, she describes the dancing as less self-conscious and that ‘she had really been spoiled’ and how was she going to get used to DJ Anju’s spinning at the Cooler?

DJ Anju had said that if Shobhna went anywhere, go to Bluenote. So, when her friend Neelam comes into London for a whirlwind weekend of museums, clubs, and Oxford Street, they head to Hoxton. It means trekking on the District Line from Earl’s Court to Victoria, switching on to the Victoria line to King’s Cross and then taking the Misery Line to Old Street and walking the last couple of street blocks.

At around one in the morning, Neelam and Shobhna are at one of the back exits of Bluenote, where it is quiet enough to talk. Milind is there, having bought them drinks, telling them about people he knew at Columbia when he was there for business school. Parul is also there, telling them an upscale version of what she tells the Asian girls she
accosts in the Limelight restroom - 'hey, I am writing a book on second
generation Asian femininity, can I talk to you some time?'

Tushar goes back up into the crimson hallway, into the front room,
which itself is packed. He doubles back, and goes down to the dance
floor, and stands, and looks for the bobbing hair that is Parul. He makes
his way through the dance floor, and at the end, there is a door. He
swings it open and catches Parul saying, "No, we're not Asian," and
smiles, and says, "Parul, I've been looking for you." Parul, swings her
head and stops. Neelam turns around, Shobhna looks at him and stares.
Tushar looks at Shobhna and turns to Parul, "so, aren't you going to
introduce us?"

At Hoxton and adjacent Shoreditch, clubs such as the BlueNote interject a
night-time economy in a district being reinscribed by artist, architect and design
workspaces, businesses which support restyled cafes, pubs, copy/print shops; even
a bookstore stays open late on Shoreditch High Street. At Spitalfields, these
happenings are more apparent and higher profile. This is, in part, due to the spatial
spillover of the financial district and its denizens, the success of the artisans,
fashion and furniture designers in the Spitalfields Market in attracting visitors to
the area, and the nearby Whitechapel Gallery, an important contemporary art
gallery in London. The conversion of the former Truman Brewery complex off
Brick Lane into an array of small offices, the Vibe Bar, the Coffee House, and a
host of galleries and design boutiques, is only a concentrated reflection of a diffuse
process of the local rise of cultural industries. That the complex held part of
London Fashion Week in the fall of 1998 was the tip of an iceberg of a much
larger process. James Pretlove, writing in the pages of the Guardian's Space
magazine that was launched in 1997, talks about the Vibe:

Sit in the lobby of the Truman's brewery on Brick Lane and you'll soon
notice the extreme youth and the even more extreme coolness of the steady
stream of people walking through the gates. And the reason for this? [It's
not a brewery any more, but is in the process of becoming a vast number of
spaces for rent to members of the creative communities. Spread over a 10
acre site and spanning every architectural style from early Georgian
warehouse buildings to a late-Seventies office block, there is close to a
million square feet of space in the process of being developed. It's ten
years since Truman, Hanbury and Buxton started to wind down their
operations on this site, seven years since they stopped brewing completely
and three years since they left altogether which was when the freehold was
bought by the brewery's present owners, the Zeloof [sic] Partnership.
[The three operators of the Vibe] had experience in band management and
event production, and within a relatively short space of time had assembled
an enviable selection of photographers, fashion designers, including rising
star Tristan Webber, DJs (Groove Rider), and musicians (Talvin Singh). The
total count of spaces already let stands at 170. Atlantis, the largest art-
supplies shop in London, and long-term fixture on Brick Lane, is [across the
street]...It's provided a perfect backdrop for music videos (Boyzone, Mica
Paris, Kula Shaker, Goldie, the Bluetones and All Saints have all been
filmed here). And there have been enough of the right parties and must-see
shows staged here to ensure that any fashion pack member has made the
journey east [that is, into Spitalfields] at least once: Hussein Chalayan sets
up his catwalk in the Atlantis gallery twice a year. Tristan Webber has
followed suit; Dazed & Confused, Diesel and Levi's have all kicked up
their heels in the main Truman Brewery building (1998: 10).

What is interesting about this admittedly lengthy quote, besides the stringing of
names, is how Pretlove tells the story. His inventory presents a gathering of
various cultural enterprises – fashion, music, art, and photography -- within the
recycled cavernous spaces of a brewery, incidentally one of London's largest and
oldest. Yet, Pretlove also places the construction of this mini cultural quarter
within a description of the property transactions necessary for all this to happen; in
this sense, he gives the material basis for the cultural quarter. Moreover, this is
under the auspices of the Guardian, perhaps Britain's best known Left-leaning paper, and in their new *Space* magazine, itself a two dozen-odd page which features a different London neighborhood each week, tells its readers about hot design and property buys, features architectural commentary, among other things. The self-consciousness of this linking of the supposedly ‘hip’ newspaper public -- *Space* appears weekly on Fridays -- suggests a sensibility of approaching and valuing space as site of cultural entrepreneurship, innovation and energy. Pretlove presents not *who* is there, but *how* it comes together, a glance at the cultural quarter in the making. In this way, *Space* provides publicity for not only the dropped names, but also the process by which a cultural quarter is marketed.

The redevelopment of the Truman Brewery, from its ownership by Grand Metropolitan plc, who, as Pretlove rightly describes, got rid of the brewery operations, to its conversion by Zalouf Partnership into spaces for uses by various cultural industries, is an important part of the transformation of Spitalfields. SSBA director Kay Jordan told us in Chapter Four how the former CEO of Grand Metropolitan, Allen Sheppard, was an important presence on Prince Charles' Business in the Community program in Spitalfields in the late 1980s. In that interview, Kay described how Grand Metropolitan had bought Truman Brewery for strictly what she called “asset-stripping” purposes. That is, the Brewery was worth buying because its value as an empty building that could be converted for various commercial uses was greater than its historic use as a brewery.

For non-profit community business organizations like SSBA or Cityside, the regeneration company coordinating economic growth in the area, the goal is to allow local workspaces to flourish and to cushion them from the purely speculative
urbanism of an eastward expanding financial sector. Hence, promoting a local cultural quarter is attractive. It allows the already well-preserved intimate scale of Spitalfields to be enhanced, from its Georgian weaver houses and its medieval alleys to the face-to-face contact and sociability of Spitalfields Market. This pleases the resident conservationists. It takes advantage of the existing mixture of residential, small industrial and residential uses and the good public transport connections. This can please local residents who want to maintain intact their everyday lives and spaces and business owners who always want new and more customers. The cultural quarter, with its nurturing of such industries as film, video, music, fashion design, and architecture, is a magnet for the disaffected, disadvantaged youth who suddenly find new opportunities for diversion, expression, and, if the support facilities are there – such as at King’s Cross with Raw Material or at Sheffield -- training and gainful and engaging employment. Most importantly, however, it supports industries which can re-use older, smaller premises and which, at least initially, require cheap rents, various forms of seed money and finance capital, lending to a partnership among public, private, and non-profit interests in managing growth.

The cultural industries, as Lash and Urry importantly underscore, create value through the trading of intellectual property (1994: 134). The globalization of the production of such value means that the strength of national or local publishing, film, television, and advertising industries depends on its position within much larger networks of product design and development, communication, and finance (112). So, when British Culture Secretary Chris Smith points to the significance of cultural industries for repairing the national economy, he is talking
about solidifying Britain’s rather variable positions among these networks --
i.e., strong in music exports, publishing and advertising, much less so in film -- and
its ability to create and leverage intellectual property (1998: appendix).

As a result, Lash and Urry argue that the cultural industries entail not so
much the further commodification of culture à la Frankfurt School, but, like
advertising agencies, the *branding* or packaging of cultural products:

What (all) the culture industries produce becomes increasingly, not like
commodities but advertisements. As with advertising firms, the culture
industries sell not themselves but something else and they achieve this
through ‘packaging’. Also like advertising firms, they sell ‘brands’ of
something else. And they do this through the transfer of value through
images. The cultural industries are becoming not more like industrial
commodity producing firms but increasingly like post-industrial firms
such as producer services. In their loss of a manufacturing function, in
their advertising function, in their taking on of mainly a financial
function, the culture industries are becoming increasingly like business
services. This branding activity can be undertaken by advertisers, by the
managerial hierarchies of culture industry firms, by self-branding stars, or
by creative culture industry *auteurs* such as cinema directors (138).

What happens, I would ask, when this branding carries over into the city’s
spaces? For, in the notion of the cultural quarter, we have both the spatialization
of the cultural industries, or production, and the promotion of these and other
services to draw visitors to these areas, or consumption. This contradiction
continues for Spitalfields’s small businesspeople, including the SSBA. For, if
local industries are to develop and prosper, then new customer bases, such as those
pouring to experience the range of artisanal, leisure and retail uses at the Market
site, are needed. This is the double bind of the inner city: in its attempts to
regenerate its physical environment, rebuild its economic base, and develop a
sense of community, its managers are forced to package and sell it to tourists. Yet,
for the regeneration executives in the inner city, exploitation of the city as branded and repackaged landscape cannot be ignored. Indeed, at Spitalfields, against the narrative of Pretlove, Cityside’s third regeneration program is called “Releasing the Visitor Economy.”

Andrew Bramidge offers a glimpse at the ongoing packaging of Spitalfields for the tourist, or as he said to me, “we don’t tend to use the word tourism…we call them visitors rather than tourists.” I didn’t push his choice of words, but mentioned how much I thought Spitalfields had visibly changed over the year, what with the new galleries, boutiques and cafes at Truman Brewery, the upscale housing at the ‘Silk Quarter’, the refurbishment of Christ Church Spitalfields. I added how I saw a tour of people crossing Commercial Road towards the Church, and that I had seen an increasingly seen more young, white, urbane types – walking through its streets, or even on the sidewalk chatting at the front door of some friend’s flat.

Andrew nodded, took my observations, and gave a profile of the new tourist, for whom Spitalfields and the East End is on a must-see itinerary. “We are getting more of that,” he said. “But it tends to be people in and around London having a day out, Spitalfields on a Sunday.” However, Andrew is ambitious for the “Releasing the Visitor Economy” program and wants to “attract people from a wider area and overseas tourists as well.” Of course, Andrew knows that for first-time visitors, Spitalfields may not be what they’re looking for; “they’ll go to the Tower [of London] and Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament and all that stuff.” But, for “[t]he people who are coming back here and looking for
something different – we'd want to position Spitalfields as one of the key destinations."

How can we not find the irony of this dedication to regeneration – preventing an encroaching City, but building links with its financial companies to source their supply needs in Spitalfields; or, developing non-profit workspaces further south in Shadwell – that ends up stealing a page from Fodor's *Exploring London*? As I look across Andrew at the morning traffic on Commercial Road, in Cityside's offices in the soon to be redeveloped Spitalfields Market, I wonder whether there is a way out of this double bind, of the rhetoric of community building becoming an advertisement for tourism.

At the *Crash, Bang, Wallop!* Party during the last days of Battlebridge that I wrote about in the previous chapter, the tension of my narrative came from the potential consequences of packaging King's Cross as a night-out for the seriously trendy. Importantly, it was not an everyday event. That is, it was still an atypical happening, despite the notorious Bagley's in earshot distance. *Crash, Bang, Wallop*, in effect, was discontinuous from the days of the Clash playing at the local pub up the road, which Una reminisced about in Chapter Three.

At Spitalfields, the process of repackaging, branding, is already on the minds of the local regenerationists and in the hands of tourist guide publishers. Moreover, between critically understanding and developing new economic arrangements that transform the inner city as cultural quarter, making it a late capitalist zone of production *and* consumption, are you and I, beholders and consumers in this unfolding spectacle. If we want to be more than urban tourists,
we will have to learn to inhabit the contradiction of the inner city as cultural quarter, and more importantly, to continually recognize the contradiction. We will have to accept the entrepreneurial, capitalist energies of the cultural impresarios and the likes of SSBA and Battlebridge Centre if we prefer neither dereliction and abandonment nor an expanse of corporate offices and luxury homes, the usual fate of the reclaimed inner city. Hence, if we want mixed residential and commercial uses, mixed classes and races, exciting night life, then Spitalfields, I would argue, offers a solution.

Of course, the whole city cannot be given over to cultural quarters. Nonetheless, I have shown that the production of the cultural quarter can be common ground for a range of urbanist agents: conservationists, community planning activists, leaders in community development trusts and regeneration partnerships, and cultural entrepreneurs. These practitioners repackage the inner city, transform its former industrial and manufacturing uses into a consumption-based landscape of the ever-growing service sectors. Yet, in the process, they build linkages across constituencies and thus realize the essential dream and purpose of urban life.

\[1 \text{I use the British term Asian which refers to Britons of South Asian (i.e., Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) descent. It is a some sense an evolutional term, having come out of two generations of South Asian migration to Britain, and signifying the politics of cultural affiliation and identity that took hold in the 1980s and 1990s.}\]

\[2 \text{My usage of class here is specific to the British context, where money need not be the sole, or even, primary determinant. Other factors, such as schooling, family background, social networks, interests, and of course, accent, are also important.}\]
This was fascinating, since it was the first I had heard that Coal and Fish was scouting for a tenant, and certainly we hadn’t got wind of it at KXRLG, itself reflective of the group’s increasing marginalization in the day to day decision-making of the future King’s Cross.

Talvin Singh is easily the most famous diasporic British South Asian musician. He recently won the 1999 Mercury Prize and is known for his music that syncretically weaves classical Indian ragas played on sitar and tabla, Hindu mythological narrative, and popular dance music (his recent CD OK hit the top of the dance charts). Singh has become something of an Asian impresario, initiating a veritable club scene around his music, dubbed the ‘Asian Underground’ and chatting with Amitabh Bachchan, a classic hero from popular Bombay cinema, at a forum during the Institute of Contemporary Arts’ Bombay-London event in July 1998. Falu Bakrania, an Indian-American and PhD candidate in Anthropology at Stanford University, who was doing fieldwork on Asian music in London at the same time I was, has been a helpful guide in tracking the London Asian music scene.
AFTERTWORD

*Repackaging the Inner City* is about the transformation of two inner city districts, King’s Cross, the site of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link terminus and Spitalfields, east of the City, Europe’s financial district, from leftover industrial zones to reinvigorated quarters showcasing cultural and entertainment uses. It is an effort to mobilize ethnography as a multiform analytical vehicle – part direct observation, part participatory involvement, part transparent interview, part oblique critique – in the service of the range of concerns it arranges – London, urban revitalization, the aesthetic politics of historic preservation, the collusion of community politics with entrepreneurialism, and the spatialization of the service economy in the form of cultural quarter.

In terms of content, this dissertation is a product of a series of events and experiences in London. The London I went to the field with was an assemblage of family photographic- and cinematic-inspired memories, a desire for the old and the irrevocably urban, a very makeshift bibliography and a coincidental meeting that gave me my first handful of interviews and my first and main field site: King’s Cross. In terms of form and of theoretical preferences, the *Repackaged Inner City* bares the mark of my preoccupations before fieldwork: my interest in the linkages between aesthetics -- emotions, feelings, sensibilities, tastes -- to politics, in deploying anthropology as a strategic, responsibility-laden communicative tool, and in what I used to call radical subjectivity.
I was always interested in how ethnography could chart and locate such subjectivity within an exploration of a shifting terrain of cultural politics. This was the basis of my first dissertation proposal on South Asian diasporans and my research into the Bloomsbury Group, jumpstarted by Raymond Williams’ essay “The Bloomsbury Fraction.” There, Williams describes this celebrated circle of friends as beleaguered subjects of radicalism. His notion of the beleaguered subject appealed to me greatly and led me to an early ethnographic object in London: the aesthetic politics of London’s conservationists. The conservationists, while not necessarily radical, mobilize a cultivated interest in the urban fabric that seeks to sustain the presence of the old (and relatedly, older ways of being) in a contemporary cityscape defined by the prerogatives of real estate speculation.

In Repackaging the Inner City, I refigure my interest in subjectivity, and hence, my use of ethnography, as agency. I pay less attention to individual subject formation in the inner city than I do to a set of individuals and groups actively engaged in the production, revitalization, preservation and repackaging of King’s Cross and Spitalfields. As such, I shift my focus from informants to their actions in order to form a web of interests created by maneuvering through governmental policies of heritage, urban regeneration, nonprofit community-based strategies of urban planning and economic development, and the governmental and private sector collaborative push to expand the cultural sector. A focus on assembling the agency of individuals and groups provides certain advantages. On the one hand, it makes for a different strategy on how ethnography is deployed in the production of knowledge. On the other, it allows
for a flexible framework in which to investigate and sculpt an analysis of the quickly changing object that is the global city, in which the positioning of the ethnographer is entangled, yet distinctive.

I remain curious of the potential of this positioning. On retrospect, it resembles less the beleaguered radical than the developing agency of many of the individuals and groups I have written about. There is a great deal of room in which the urban ethnographer can situate him or herself, get involved and interact with others in the ongoing transformation of the inner city from industrial areas to cultural and entertainment districts.

Important to the birth of this project was the Hanif Kureishi and Stephen Frears film, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. The film's collage of radical metropolitan politics of class, gender, sexuality, diaspora and postcoloniality during the late 1980s is set in the decaying inner city. Most evocative is the gathering of all the major characters during the eviction and bulldozing of a squatter settlement in an area ripe for redevelopment. Here, is the raw realities of the effects of Thatcherite social policy in motion – the displacement of a community in the name of development, the denial of the social democratic principles of the vulnerable citizen's right to housing in favor of late capitalism's incessant need to traffic in speculative real estate. With the ironic melding of the melancholic overtones of "I Vow to Thee My Country," the late Princess Diana's favorite hymn and the heroic and proud pronouncements of Maggie Thatcher, Kureishi and Frears present a scenario in which the inner city actor is truly beleaguered, caught in the vortex of a nation in decline.
Rather than rehearse this scenario in my dissertation, I have looked for the signs of its overcoming and the successful mobilization rather than defeat of inner city agency. I do not suggest that there has not been displacement nor that buildings have not been lost. Moreover, I argue that inner cityscapes have become spectacularized in their ongoing specializations as culture zones. Nonetheless, if we agree that the mobilization of agency is preferable, then beyond the gritty glamour of the preservation, revitalization and ongoing repackaging of the inner city as cultural quarter is the immense potential of local democracy in the global city, the furthering of which has been the subtext throughout this dissertation.
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