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Coming to Our Senses: A Multisensory Exploration of Class and Multiculture in East London

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Thesis submitted for the degree of

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Introduction: Coming to Our Senses

Ali is a quiet man, a trader, born in Pakistan, living in east London. He has worked in his open-fronted shop, located to the side of an east London street market, for the last fifteen years. Ridley Road market is busy six days a week, and for the last century has fed local residents with a wide range of fruits, vegetables and meats. In many respects, Ali, the east London market trader, born in Pakistan is an exemplary “assimilationist hero.”¹ In the context of an east London street market, however, ‘assimilation’ looks, smells and tastes quite different than is normally understood.

While being interviewed by a sociologist, Ali arranges transparent polythene bags of dried salt fish, sorrel, dried gungo beans and yellow plastic tubs of salted ox tongue he had picked up in the early hours from a nearby wholesaler of Afro-Caribbean food. He takes a break from arranging his stall to barter over some powdered yam with a particularly curt Nigerian woman, before returning to preparations for the day. Having arranged his products, Ali lights incense sticks to ward off the smell of the neighbouring fishmonger and the seagulls it attracts. The woody smell of sandalwood mixes with a faint hint of cloves that fills the open fronted shop. As he swings for one of the seagulls, a female voice emerges from the market crowd, seemingly laughing at him. The owner of the locally inflected chuckle reveals herself as Angela, a thirty-five year old British woman, born to Caribbean parents. The shopping list she carries in her head is for the ingredients she acquired a taste for in early adulthood: beans, salted fish, scotch-bonnet peppers and a small bag of what she affectionately calls “my spices;” She enters the shop, and greets Ali, her friend, before being introduced to the sociologist that

¹ A figure idealised within the social policy discourse of the last two decades. See: Michael Keith, *After the Cosmopolitan?* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 82.

is ‘hanging around’ the market interviewing its patrons and traders, trying to make sense of the complex meshwork that constitutes the everyday life of the market.

How is the sociologist to approach the transnational connections that span contemporary life in a globalised urban context? How to extrapolate from these ‘everyday’ interactions, insights into the production of the social forms in a twenty-first century city? How to conceptualise the nuances of social formations without recourse to crude and ill-fitting caricatures of culture, class, globalisation, multiculturalism? How to express the significance of sensuous biographies and cultural histories without over privileging the role of ‘the individual’; without losing touch with the wider social processes that cut across her biography and shape her sensibility? In this thesis, I will argue that the answers to these questions lie in a close attention to the multisensory ambiances of everyday urban life and the meanings attributed to them.

The Insensible Urban

Cities are inherently sonorous, smelly and full of both delectable and stomach-turning things. As Georg Simmel once noted, the way in which cities bombard the senses is one of the definitive traits of urban life and a key factor in shaping urban individuals, as well as the social forms that they comprise.² However, despite the seemingly obvious importance of the multisensory environment to urban identities and social formations, the most influential sociologists of urban space have, over recent decades, repeatedly cautioned against trying to understand cities from amidst the thick, sensuous clamour of urban life. The sensuous experience of the city dweller, it is argued, are simply too microscopic, myopic, self-involved

² Georg Simmel *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

and localised to lend anything new to the understanding of social processes that, in a contemporary context, operate at a supra-individual and global scale.

Accordingly, for macro theorists of urban space, the preferred social scientific means to represent cities, and to understand the life evolving therein, is to set up a lens at least 450 miles above an urban form. Elevated out of the clamorous urban miasma, the “zenith view,” produces a peculiar spatio-temporal gestalt, through which gargantuan globe spanning flows in finance, labour, commodity and information become perceptible.³ Free of the illegible and transient clamour of urban life’s sounds, smells, textures and flavours, from the position of erstwhile angels and latter day Google Earthers, emerge “macro spatial” maps delineating the “organising principles” of contemporary cities. The nodal conjunctions of “space and power” discerned by Edward Soja and the global “control points” identified by Saskia Sassen are subsequently credited with the becoming-one-none-place of the world, a social process that produces what David Harvey sees from a distance as “serial monotony” and what Sassen credits with “overriding... history and culture.”⁴ Such processes are, the macro spatial theorists argue, of such a scale to be largely invisible within the temporal and spatial scale of the naive city dweller, yet at the same time crucial to fixing both her movements through the city, and her life trajectory.

Certainly, the tools and abstractions of this globe-encompassing form of urban sociology have led to the identification of discernible geographies of resource control, capital accumulation

3 Stephano Boeri in Koolhaas, Rem, Stefano Boeri, Sanford Kwinter, Nadia Tazi, Hans-Ulrich Obrist (eds.) *Mutations*. (Barcelona: ACTAR, 2000), 358.

4 Edward Soja, *Thirdspace* (Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell, 1996), 153.

Saskia Sassen “Rebuilding the Global City, Economy, Ethnicity and Space,” in Anthony D. King *Representing the City - Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the 21st Century* (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 22-34.

David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1989), 73. Sassen, *Ibid.*, 1996, 23-43.

and latterly, environmental impact, that shape the processes of social formation in cities.⁵ However, as notable criticisms of macro-urban theory such as those developed by Rosalyn Deutsche and Michel deCerteau have suggested,⁶ zooming out to a view of the city from 450 miles up does not necessarily mean ‘more’ is subsequently encompassed within the ‘frame,’ nor that social formation becomes any more explicable. While revealing certain aspects of reality, such generalised representations are often as myopic as the perspective of the city dweller, revealing little of the interaction between the sensuous, corporeal experience of city dwellers and the mechanisms and procedures underpinning it.

Partially following these critiques, I want to argue that to properly understand the relationship between everyday urban lives and globe spanning processes, sociologists and urban theorists require additional kinds of sensitivity and alternative representational practices: In particular, I want to argue that they require a sensitivity to the multisensory ambiances of everyday urban life; a sensitivity that involves both recognising the constant work of the senses in urban space, the material history of the ambiances that fill it, as well as the social history of the sensibilities through which this ambience is interpreted. It is through such a sensitivity that the sociologist is able to witness the torrential global processes identified by grand theory meeting the irrepressible eddies, under-tows, counter currents and cross winds of culture, with which they combine to carve the social formations of contemporary cities.

This is certainly not, however, an attempt to argue that those living the everyday life of cities are somehow better positioned to expound upon social processes that shape their lives than the

5 Martin Albrow, *The Global Age* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997).

6 Taking the criticism as step further, Rosalyn Deutsche points to political stakes in the maintaining the prominence of macro-spatial representations of urban life. Speaking from a critique of urban theory with origins in critical gender studies, Deutsche argues that the prominence of such modes of thought are successful manifestations of an age old political struggle to immunise cities and their ‘masters’ against vectors originating from else where in space and time and hypothesis for society developed in bodies other than those within which theory is constructed. See: Rosalyn Deutsche *Evictions - Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

aforementioned macro-theorists of urban life. Nor that their lives are any less structured and determined than as presented by macro-theorists of space. What I am arguing here is that, subject to critical sociological attention, sensuous experiences of life, as lived, in cities, reveal a far more complex account of social formation, and the structuring of everyday life, than the disembodied eyes of macro urban theory. Accordingly, below I will attempt to provide details of an antidote to an all-too-prevalent sociological numbness, deafness and amnesia; a general anaesthesia that has, over the recent decades, threatened to overcome sociological enquiry and sequester some of the key, everyday processes through which contemporary social forms are produced.

That is not to say, that this is a totally new endeavour without theoretical resources. Despite recent preference for de-sensitised representational practices, urban sociology in particular has, for a long time, nurtured an undercurrent of thought attentive to the subjective experience of urban dwellers and its relationship with social formation: In the overlapping spheres of urban sociology, anthropology and history, innumerable urban ethnographers have in fact, to borrow Michel de Certeau's terminology, forgone "imaginary totalisations" and zoomed their analysis, "down below" to the level of the city's dwellers' experience.⁷ Over recent decades in particular, the theoretical "tool-kit" bequeathed to social scientists by Michel Foucault, not a scholar of urban situations himself, has yielded particular useful understandings of the interaction between subjective experience and social formation within cities.⁸ In particular, the tools bequeathed by such a famous "voyant" with a "passion for seeing,"⁹ evident throughout his work, have greatly increased attention to the relationship between specifically *visual* experiences of city dwellers and the production of particular kinds

7 Michel de Certeau and Steven Rendall, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

8 Michel Foucault, *Power Knowledge Selected Interviews* ed., Colin Gordon (London: Palgrave 1980), 143.

9 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*. (London: Continuum, 2006), 42.

of sociality.¹⁰ Doubtlessly, a deeper understanding of the urban dwellers' view of life "down below" has enriched understandings of social process in urban contexts. Attention honed upon the urban eye has, for example, helped understand the reproduction of bodies, governed by gendered gazes, and the wider socio-spatial production of gender within cities.¹¹ As Londa Schienbinger has demonstrated, a Foucaultian attention interaction between the eye and historically and culturally contingent ways of seeing has also helped unpick and understand the historical construction of race and racism; a "discourse of power that" Les Back and Michael Bull contend "thinks with its eyes."¹² More generally, the Foucaultian toolkit has revealed numerous insights into the manner in which the regimes of surveillance deployed from both above and below shape the social life of cities.¹³

However, in many ways, these attempts to 'zoom in' and understand social formation from the perspective of the 'walker' mirrors certain aspects of the representational practices favoured by macro theorists of urban space: If the dominant way of understanding life in global cities has been to take a view of a disembodied eye from 450 miles up and the critical response has been to privilege the *perspective* of city dwellers, there is still a significant portion of experience "down below" missing from sociological investigations of urban life. Following Georg Simmel's assertion that "*every sense* delivers contributions characteristic of its individual nature to the construction of sociated existence, we might ask: what about the senses of hearing, smell, taste and touch, let alone the other senses of balance, thermo-sensitivity and

10 Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: the birth of the prison* (London: Penguin, 1977).
Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003).

11 Chris Jenks, *Visual Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 150.
Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
Steve Pile, *The Body and the City* (London New York: Routledge, 1996).

12 Michael Bull and Les Back, *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2003), 14.

13 Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (London: Verso, 2006), 253.

proprioception:¹⁴ Just reflecting on our own experience of these senses for the briefest of moments, it would seem that there is a great deal more to the formation of subjectivities and social forms in urban environments, than ‘meets the eye’. It is not that urban sociology has been completely numb to ‘the other’ senses. Indeed, since Georg Simmel’s initial assertion of the importance of all the senses, there has been a steady growth in literature that has sought to understand urban life through engaging in a “democracy of the senses,” and even more work that has incorporated brief accounts of textures, tastes and smells.¹⁵ However, it is still often the case that, when the experience of nostrils, tongues, fingers and ears are rendered in sociological representation of urban life, it is as an ambient background against which the sensational ‘spectacle’ of real life takes place.¹⁶ Accordingly, the rest of this thesis is committed to answering how these lesser thought and theorised about aspects of sensory experience shape the class, race and gender-inflected social formations that constitute the very stuff of urban social formations. While this is intended to constitute an argument for a broad multisensory sociology, the argument is made through a focus on the interrelated, and under-theorised, senses of taste and smell as they operate in urban environments.

The Sense in Sensory Sociology

Despite the aforementioned sociological amnesia, anyone that has lived in, or even visited a contemporary city will testify to the fact that cities still play home to a myriad of flavours and aromas. While a city’s resident might not notice these as much as an outsider, having become

14 Georg Simmel, *Simmel on Culture*, ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: SAGE, 1997), 110.

15 Joachim-Ernst Berendt, *The Third Ear: On Listening to the World* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1992).

Michael Bull, *Sounding out the City* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000).

Monica Degen, *Sensing Cities* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2008).

Michael Bull and Les Back, *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2003).

Paul Stoller, *Money Has no Smell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009).

16 Nadia Seremetakis, *The Senses Still* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

habitually acquainted with them, it is not to say that they do not register on the body or play a social role beneath the level of experience we call discursive consciousness.¹⁷ Perhaps the most obvious ways in which the tapestry of urban aromas and flavours might effect social formation anywhere, would be the relationship they have with memory, specifically with ‘episodic memory’. As Juhani Pallasmaa writes in his manifesto for a more sensuously sympathetic architecture and architectural theory, ‘The Eyes of the Skin,’

“A particular smell makes us un-knowingly re-enter a space completely forgotten by the retinal memory; the nostrils awaken a forgotten image, and we are enticed to enter a vivid day dream. The nose makes the eyes remember.”¹⁸

Pallasmaa’s observations are famously echoed in Marcel Proust’s literary meditations and explored sociologically within the work of Nadia Serematakis and David Sutton.¹⁹ As each demonstrates, the encounter with even the most diluted of smells or flavours from an individual or culture’s past or elsewhere – a biscuit, a fruit, a herb, an aftershave, a spice – enable the body to rekindle entire lifetimes of experience around the faintest ember in the present. No doubt their ability to awaken deeply embodied affinities and associations is one of the reasons that, as Pat Caplan and Constance Classen have separately detailed, the senses of smell and taste are, transculturally, the most important sense modalities to socially formative rituals, and through their repetitive encounter, central to the embodied praxis of everyday life.²⁰

17 By ‘discursive consciousness’ I mean to adhere to Anthony Giddens’ definition of that which “connotes those forms of recall that the actor is able to express verbally” either to her self or others. See: Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 48.

18 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 54.

19 Marcel Proust and Charles Kenneth Scott-Moncrieff (trans.) *Remembrance of Things Past* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2006).

Nadia Serematakis, *The Senses Still* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

David Evan Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001).

20 Patricia Caplan and Goldsmiths’ College, *Feasts, Fasts and Famines* (Goldsmiths’ College, University of London, 1992). Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott, *Aroma* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994).

This centrality of taste and smell to both memory and everyday social relations takes on a special significance in contemporary cities. One of the consequences of both the voluntary and indentured mobility²¹ that much of contemporary urban living engenders is that, as Tim Edensor has written, the “embodied praxis” out of which a home is made, potentially “dissembles” according to the absence of “sensory familiarities” in new locations.²² Faced with the alienating sensory and social experience of dislocation, it is first and foremost the aromas and flavours of ‘home’ that the ‘stranger’ in the contemporary city seeks out to make life at least partially liveable. Put otherwise, in a world where both individual and social life is always on the brink of ‘melting into air,’ the nose and taste-buds forge anchors for dislocated bodies, and create moorings of communities, sometimes out of the most vapourous of materialities. In this respect, turning our noses and taste-buds towards the urban environment reveals the extent to which, despite the metastasising anaesthesia attributed to global modernity, distinct senses of locality can endure, and communities (re)assemble, around the preponderance of aromas and flavours that fill contemporary, ‘global’ cities.

It is not, however, only such obviously global diasporas that aim to flesh out notions of self, identity and community around sensory kernels scattered throughout contemporary cities. Within the same context, certain aromas and flavours are also central to the ways in which the experience of ‘locality’ and exclusivist ‘local’ identities are animated.²³ For example, and I will return throughout to this example, for many London-born working class men, the maritime flavours of jellied eels and cockles, are the kernels through which both a territorial sense of an

21 Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 82.

22 Tim Edensor, ‘Sensing Tourist Spaces’ in C.Minca and T. Oakes (eds) *Travels in Paradox: Remapping Tourism* (London: Rowman and Littlefield 2006).

23 By ‘local’ I mean, following Zygmunt Bauman’s typology of globalisation’s ‘social types,’ as the ontology that arises from a human body, fixed to a territory and around which the global world moves. Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York Columbia University Press, 1998), 83.

indigenous ‘island race,’ and a sense of what has ‘been lost’ is articulated.²⁴ As the examples that I will work through in this thesis aim to demonstrate, regardless of whether the subject is a ‘local,’ or a drifting ‘vagabond;’ in a world where social coherence seems on the brink of ‘melting into air,’ the nose and taste-buds are the most able of senses to forge solid anchors out of the most ephemeral and gaseous of materials.

These two processes, the formation of local identities and the ‘reconstitution’ of dislocated global identities, are not, however, necessarily two processes apart from one another. As I will detail in chapter six, the ‘indigenous’ local maritime tastes around which an exclusivist sense of Island race is animated, are also the kernels around which strangers from elsewhere re-construct their lives within London. In the past, the taste of eels and shellfish from the Thames estuary were the polyvalent tastes around which migrants from Russia, Holland and Italy once re-constructed their lives. Today they are also the flavours through which an Iraqi refugee finds everyday warmth, rekindling gustatory memories of the Tigris and the Nile.

It is particularly in its attention to the co-mingling of both local and global influences within the sensuous experiences that fill contemporary cities, that this thesis attempts to make its original contribution: Through the application of a critical attention to the experience of urban noses and taste-buds, it is the intention to reveal that neither the global, nor the local are necessarily exclusive, or counterposed, concepts. Rather, through the nose and tongue, it is the intention to reveal the historical traces of the global within the culture of a specific locale. Using the olfactory and gustatory experiences of east London as a starting point, the thesis argues that local culture within most contemporary conurbations arises out of multiple layers of transcultural histories; a thick sensuous sediment deposited by past and present cultural

²⁴ Phil Cohen, *The Last Island* (Dagenham: Centre for New Ethnicities Research, 1998)
http://openlibrary.org/b/OL16636531M/last_island.

currents, within which habituated sensory boundaries between lifeworlds are smudged. In this respect, the senses of smell and taste are revealed as the senses most central to the sustenance of remarkable forms of everyday urban multiculturalism. However, as well as sustaining such conspicuously transnational social forms, this thesis also argues that simultaneously, these are the two senses through which distinct senses of locality most effectively endure, and that despite the desensitising tendencies ascribed to late modernity, they are the senses through which the signatures of place remain sensible. However, as I will detail later, despite the ability of these senses to create bridges between distinct life worlds, they are also, paradoxically, the senses through which senses of exclusive identity and community are most readily mobilised and fiercely policed.

The Social (Re)Production of Sensibility

The ways in which the nose and taste-buds are enrolled into the reproduction of identities and cultures, as well as their role in the production of new urban identities and cultures, is needless to say, insensible from the view of the city derived from 450 miles in the sky. Yet no doubt, the mode of sociological attention being sketched out here, would cause concern for what many might see as the “over privileging of the body, the streetscape... micro-worlds of everyday life”; a distraction from “the structuring of the city as a whole [and] the political economy of urban process.”²⁵ Yet to spurn the disembodied view of angels, and to turn noses and taste-buds toward the sensuous ambience of everyday urban life, is by no means to move away from more general critical interpretations of urban life. Nor is an attention to ‘individual’ experiences the starting point for a portrait of agential power and freedom. Rather the main purposes of zooming the interpretative analysis in to the level of the poly-sensory streetscape

²⁵ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 21.

are to reveal other processes, *insensible* from on high; processes that, working through the senses, mould the textures of social reality within.

Although there is still an absence of contemporary sociological theory and theoreticians that have undertaken such tasks with regards to a specifically urban context, there are a number of historical and sociological studies of the senses and sensibilities that are notable for their attempts to relate the sensuous ‘micro-worlds of everyday life’ to the ‘structuring and political economy of the whole’. In *The Civilising Process*, an early precursor to much of the emergent socio-sensory literature, Norbert Elias, sketches the ‘evolution’ European ‘ways of sensing’: a type of socio-sensory process that emerged symbiotically with increasingly differentiated socio-economic strata in western Europe.²⁶ For Elias, the evolution of new sensibilities and sensitivities to the ‘other’ reflected and reinforced the development of social forms through which socially important senses of class difference were maintained.

While Elias develops a general framework for approaching the social production of the senses, a number of social historians have carried the project further, and attempted to relate the emergence of early modern European social landscapes to more specific interpretations of smells and flavours. In *The Foul and the Fragrant* for example, Alain Corbin conducts a close analysis of political, economic and social changes within early modern France, and their relationship with the emergent olfactory senses of distinction that regulated the social boundaries.²⁷ Similarly, Stephen Mennell explicitly elaborates Elias’s thesis with an account of how distinctions between town and country, rich and poor, were reproduced through the

26 Norbert Elias et al., *The Civilising Process* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 347.

27 Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988)
Notably, Rodolphe el-Khoury has extended Corbin’s socio-sensory historical analysis into a consideration of the relationship between early modern urban aromas, and the emergent imperative to simultaneously “polish and deodorise” troublesome urban spaces and populations. See: Rodolphe el-Khoury, ‘Polish and Deodorize’ *Assemblage* 31, (1997), 6-15.

development of tastes specific to a particular social strata and locality.²⁸ In a similar way, Italian historian Piero Camporesi elaborates on coincidence between gradually shifting social landscapes, and the explicit desire of late medieval Italy's noble class to define themselves through tastes.²⁹ Although focusing intensely on the micro-worlds of everyday life, each of the above authors does so explicitly to increase understandings of the wider modality of power governing social formation within a given time and place. However, none of the authors above, be they social historians or historical sociologists, properly traces the development of the sensibilities and sensory experiences of everyday life into their contemporary form.

Fortunately, the relationship between the senses and more contemporary processes of social stratification was central to Pierre Bourdieu's late sixties, magnum opus, *Distinction*.³⁰ Crudely speaking, for the Bourdieu who wrote *Distinction*, gut feelings, aroused by certain sensory experiences, separate and cement social strata by marking one socio-economic group, identified by its sensory signatures, as "distinct" from the other. These gut feelings, however, for Bourdieu are far from biologically given. Rather they are constantly (re)produced through the practices associated with pre-existent forms of socio-economic stratification. For Bourdieu, as private and personal as experiences of gustatory and olfactory "tastes" and "distastes" might seem,³¹ they are bequeathed by external forces and are integral to the manner in which a body is fixed to impersonal socio-economic processes.

Although his theory was developed with the very particular social and economic context of mid-twentieth-century France, the importance of Bourdieu's theory to understanding the

28 Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

29 Piero Camporesi, *Bread of Dreams* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

30 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

31 *Ibid.*, 169-226.

reproduction of class difference, through everyday praxis and experience, is reiterated in Tony Bennet and Mike Savages work, which tests and affirms many aspects of Bourdieu's thesis within a contemporary British context.³² To return to the point at hand, far from diverting attention away from the structuring of everyday life, all the thinkers enlisted above, provide ways of thinking through the relationship between the sense and sociality in contemporary of cities. In particular they help understand how ways of sensing are shaped by large scale and enduring historical forces to produce a hierarchical arrangement of socio-economic classes.

However, while providing hypotheses for the relationship between 'class' formation and the senses, there are considerable lacunas in the literatures above that limit their applicability to a contemporary urban context. For instance, in their focus on relatively bounded continental contexts, and their use of ethnically homogenous samples, they contain little consideration as to how 'race' and 'gender' are historically produced through ways of sensing distinctions. Nor is there much account for how these 'modalities' of social stratification interact with the socio-sensory production of class.³³ The omission of a socio-sensory consideration of race by these authors is a particularly notable lacuna in that, as I hope to demonstrate throughout this thesis, noses and taste-buds in European cities have also consistently mediated senses of racial distinction in ways entangled with distinctions in socio-economic class.

Of course, it might be argued, there is no 'multisensory history' of race. As theorists of cinema, visual culture, feminism and race have all argued, race is first and foremost considered to be a mode of distinction articulated through the eyes; habituated through particular ways of

32 Tony Bennett, Mike Savage et. al. *Culture, Class, Distinction* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2009).

33 Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis, Mugging, State, Law and Order* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1978), 394.

seeing and reading of particular visual texts.³⁴ Certainly, the eye is central to the (re) production of racialised forms of distinction. The obvious importance of visual modes of representation to the construction of racialised identities, both imagined and real, is not, however, to say that race is merely a visually constructed phenomenon. Accordingly, in order to develop an account of the socio-sensory production of race alongside that of class in contemporary cities, the following thesis draws on a number of thinkers who have shown racial identification and racist sensibilities, to be entwined with historical processes that colonise *all of the senses*.

Although not explicitly an account of the socio-sensory production of racialised bodies, Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power*, Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *Tastes of Paradise* and Gary Okihiro's *Pineapple Culture* each consider the ways in which the foods and flavours of the early modern plantation system shaped the ways in which racialised bodies were perceived and acted upon.³⁵ Through their anthropological and historical meditations on single ingredients – pineapples sugar – Mintz and Okihiro in particular, provide both metaphors, and literal illustrations of the manner in which the sense of taste shaped the way colonial subjects were rendered as objects of desire and disgust, fuelling the production (and exploitation) of exoticised, racial others.³⁶

Not all thinkers of the multisensory construction of race are, however, so squeamish about talking about bodies as to depend on the heuristic power of the sweet and spicy and smells.

³⁴ Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
John Downing and Charles Husband, *Representing Race* (London: SAGE, 2005).

³⁵ Sidney Wilfred Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (London: Penguin Books, 1986).
Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise* (London: Vintage Books, 1993).
Gary Y. Okihiro, *Pineapple Culture: A History of the Tropical and Temperate Zones*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

³⁶ George Sebastian Rousseau and Roy Porter (eds.) *Exoticism In the Enlightenment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

Within his close analysis of the Antebellum South Mark M. Smith's account of the multisensory construction of race addresses the specific manner in which bodies themselves were made sense of, through the haptic, gustatory, olfactory protocols that constituted racism.³⁷ Contrary to the assertion that racism was first and foremost, "discourse of power that thinks with its eyes",³⁸ Smith's thesis demonstrates powerfully the manner in which race was, and is, made through contingent ways of touching, smelling and tasting the other.³⁹ There are obviously significant differences between the authors and theory enlisted above, some of which will become more apparent throughout this thesis. Yet each has produced plausible and useful accounts of the social production of various forms of multisensory experience.⁴⁰ With a focus on the social production of the senses, there is certainly little in the socio-sensory canon convened above that, fed into a multisensory consideration of the city, would detract from "the structuring of the city as a whole [and] the political economy of urban process."

Non-Histories and the Senses

In the first two of the empirical chapters that follow, I carry the socio-sensory accounts of class and race into an analysis of the relationship between sensuous experiences or urban environments. In doing so the intention is to identify the sensuous sediments of colonialism, and the British isles experience of capitalism, in the manner in which both class and racial distinctions are sensed within the poly-sensory landscapes of urban space. Despite the partial disappearance of race and class talk and 'thinking,' I will argue that the senses are still deeply

37 Mark Michael Smith, *How Race is Made* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2006).

38 Michael Bull and Les Back, *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2003), 14.

39 Mark Michael Smith, *How Race is Made* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2006).

40 Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1984), 26.

implicated in the reification of race and class and the fortification of everyday boundaries between social groups. However, as Les Back has noted in his explication of the “metropolitan paradox,” such is the nature of contemporary cities that, interwoven with the most entrenched forms of social distinction, various forms of ‘transcultural production’ necessarily develop.⁴¹ In the second section of this thesis, I will draw on ethnographic data to explore how multisensory experiences of urban environments are involved in the dissolution of class and racially inflected subjectivities, and active in the formation of novel subjects and innovative modes of affiliation.

By no means, however, is the attention afforded to locations where socio-sensory boundaries are blurred in the everyday production of new social formations and identities, meant to detract from the normative structuring of urban life. It is, however, an attempt to divert attention toward the affects of ‘other’ ‘civilising processes’ or cultural histories which have interacted with the sedimented mainstream culture of a given locality to produce differentiation within it. This is a necessary diversion in that, as Michel de Certeau has noted, sociological analyses of everyday life, such as those developed by Bourdieu and Michel Foucault are generally only attentive “practices fore-grounded,” for the purpose of “organising” society according to the requisites of centralised, “..normative institutions.”⁴² Accordingly, they tend towards analysis of the processes through which dominant forms of class and racial divisions are reproduced. However, as Certeau suggests, if social enquiry is properly conducted at everyday scales, then “ways of operating” (eating, tasting, walking and touching), can also be shown to be heavily inflected by “trajectories” other than those

41 Les Back, *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture* (London New York: Routledge, 1996), 7.

42 Michel de Certeau *Heterologies* Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press 1986), 88.

programmed into biographies by normative institutions.⁴³

While de Certeau neglects to articulate how these processes might be understood through a sociology of ‘the other senses’, Luce Girard relates Certeau’s thinking directly to olfactory and gustatory senses when he writes

“Every alimentary custom makes up a minuscule cross roads of histories... under the silent and repetitive system of everyday servitudes that one carries out by habit... there piles up a montage of gestures, rites and codes of rhythms and choices, of received usage and practiced customs.”⁴⁴

Through Girard’s useful culinary analogy, Certeau’s ‘trajectories’ can be understood as comparable to what James Clifford has coined ‘routes’.⁴⁵ Following these hypotheses, I argue throughout the last half of this thesis that the sensibilities out of which all urban cultures emerge – even those that are considered to be indigenous, enduring and having fixed boundaries – are, themselves, built upon innumerable ‘minuscule crossroads of history’ and are continually evolving.

Accordingly, at the same time as attempting to trace the effect of a ‘mainstream’ historical processes on the socio-sensory production of class and race (i.e. European capitalism and colonialism), this thesis simultaneously attempts to trace what Luce Girard refers to as “invisible non-histories,”: those which endure from the elsewhere, the past and the “never was,” and are sedimented within the practices and habits of everyday life. Girard chooses the term “invisible non-histories” because such influences are generally *insensible* within many

43 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 35.

44 Michel de Certeau, Pierre Mayol and Luce Girard, *The Practice of Everyday Life: Vol. 2*, (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1998), 171.

45 James Clifford, *Routes*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

forms of sociological enquiry. However, while “non-histories” or alternative histories are doubtlessly invisible to the desensitised standard sociological practices, they need not remain *insensible*. Through the application of a multisensory attention to the flavours and aromas of urban life, and their interpretation, this thesis attempts to make the confluence of the planet’s “non-histories” what Paul Gilroy refers to as modernity’s ‘primal histories’ sensible, tangible and delectable.⁴⁶

Conclusion and a Taste of Things to Come

To give a taste of things to come, I would now like to return to ethnographic vignette with which this chapter started. Consider the afore-described multisensory micro landscape: the grocery stall, scented with hints of incense, dried fish, cured meat and spices.⁴⁷

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the selection of empirical examples within this thesis aims to encompass situations that reveal both sides of the metropolitan paradox: the coexistence of transcultural and transnational social formations with entrenched senses of social distinction and separation produced through sensibilities that have developed over recent centuries.

Accordingly chapter four focuses on Ali and Angela’s poly-aromatic meeting place, to reveal the ways in which the market’s ambience, and interpretations of it, become enmeshed in the corporeal and affective articulation of racial distinction. Similarly, chapter three explores the production of socio-economic distinctions through which sense is made of a seafood stand selling jellied eels and whelks is made sense of. Therein, I will explore how disgust directed at

46 Michel de Certeau, Pierre Mayol and Luce Girard, *The Practice of Everyday Life: Vol. 2*, (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1998), 7.

47 Angela, like most users of the market, is a regular visitor, and the stall holders are often able to get immediate and meaningful feedback on their produce. It is perhaps for such reasons that the market is generally so well suited to serving migrant groups.

constellations of aroma, textures and tastes, shores up senses of self and other, and fuel processes of social stratification.

However, in chapters five and six, I argue for the centrality of sensuous experience of poly-sensory spaces (such as Angela and Ali's meeting place) to the social development of everyday forms of multiculturalism. Chapter five, in particular, spends considerable time around Ali's stall to conduct an analysis of the meshwork of biographies that result in the peculiar sensory ambience of the market, as well as the trans-national sensibilities through which a local strain of multiculturalism is actualised. Chapter six undertakes a similar exercise, extending attention to the sedimentation of multiple influences on the senses, into an examination of tastes considered to be 'indigenous' to London, i.e. the taste for jellied eels, cockles and whelks. In doing so it reveals the difference between the essential taste *of* these indigenous fauna, and contingent influences that result in a taste *for* them – the difference between a taste *for*, and the taste *of*, locality. Both chapter five's focus on the obvious multiculturalism of a market place, and chapter six's deconstruction of a local taste, are attempts to provide a portrait of east London's amenity to various forms of urban multiculturalism, and to trace its enduring bases.

Whether the analysis is tuned into the sensory refortification of social strata through regimes of taste and disgust, or the development of transcultural social formations through the sedimenting of multiple histories on the senses, there is an overarching intention to demonstrate that there is only so much that the urban theorist can know and say about contemporary urban contexts from the view obtained from 450 miles up. Certainly such a view reveals epoch-defining transnational expressions of control and power. However, to understand and evaluate even the most obviously universal of processes impacting on urban living, it is essential, I argue, that the sociologist develop a critical multisensory sensitivity to

the aromatic, delectable and textured experience of life on the ground of cities. *Coming to our Senses* offers a tentative curative for the anaesthesia that runs through sociological practice, and opens up new ways of understanding the social forms specific to the interconnected urban epidermis that increasingly covers the planet.

A Short Walk: Introduction to Methods and Locations

The following chapter is intended to provide a cursory introduction to the spatial and historical context of this study. As the title of this chapter suggests, the orientation is conducted by way of a walk between the key sites that feature in this ethnography. This is preceded by a sketch of the methods and representational practices that comprise this ethnography, as well as the ethical decisions taken with regard to them.

Hanging Around

In many respects, the thesis that follows is the result of a multi-sited ethnography, with observations, conversations, images and voices collected across many different locations: from council meetings and architects' practices, to radio shows, hairdressers, and pubs. Also present across this ethnography are an array of voices from different moments in time, re-aired as the focus gravitated occasionally towards local archives, archeological digs and historical representations of London. For the main part however, most of the field work for this ethnography was conducted between 2006 and 2009, while 'hanging around' two street markets in east London. The first is Petticoat Lane Market, and the second is Ridley Road Market. I will introduce these in more detail in the second half of this chapter.

While hanging around these markets, time was divided between the stall holders themselves, and more participatory engagement with the market's regular patrons.¹ Having found a handful of traders who were willing to participate, discussions and unstructured interviews

¹ Initially efforts were made to become a stall holder myself, or an unpaid caretaker for somebody else's stall. Later on in the ethnography, the opportunity arose. Initial requests were turned down.

were initially conducted in gaps between customers.² For the first eight months, these somewhat forced conversations were captured on a voice recorder which I left sat on their table top or counter. After the initial period however, as the field became familiar, rapport developed and conversations became less constrained, I switched to noting down any remarkable observations, comments or encounters in a notebook.

The moment that rapport started to develop with participants, in most instances also marked the moment when the ‘sensory’ part of the ethnography was truly able to start: This was not, it must be noted, because people would suddenly start talking about intimate sensory experiences once they became familiar with me.³ Rather, the sensory ethnography really started in the wake of the corporeal understanding of material space that merely accompanied the development of human relationships: As we all know from our personal experience, a personal rapport develops when, having ‘hung around’ together for a period – sometimes mere moments – certain things can go unremarked upon yet remain understood. Such things need not even register in ‘discursive consciousness’, or require communicating, because they are communicated as part of the sensuous relationship between two individuals. Whilst a degree of intersubjective affinity is arguably important to any ethnographic endeavour, even more important to me, tasked with undertaking a multisensory ethnography of urban space, was the rapport that I developed with the material context of the study: the rapport that enabled me to drift beyond the spectacular foreground of urban activity, and understand it on an everyday, corporeal level, as it is lived.

² Many, seemingly in light of general concerns about misrepresentation, were unwilling to participate and displayed notable hostility.

³ On the contrary, these were often given more readily when asking unknown individuals for sensory reflections

The development of this simultaneously spatial and social rapport entailed, amongst other things, becoming a regular at a seafood stand where, over the time of the ethnography, I ate hundreds of portions of eels, oysters, cockles and prawns accompanied with unknown quantities of chilli vinegar and cans of Tango. It also involved me becoming a regular shopper at street markets I might not have otherwise have visited. While some of these locations were so empty as to apparently depend on a bi-yearly visit from ethnographers for business, others were very busy and provided a fantastic array of interviewees and participants. Beyond, however, simply being enjoyable and enriching experiences, it was the development of this multisensory rapport, through hanging around in the streets and eateries of the field, that provided me the access to an understanding, beyond that of how life is narrativised and discussed, of how it is actually smelled, tasted and touched.

Walking

While the time spent with traders was often quite static, walking – both through and between the key ethnographic sites of this study – provided a lot more than a way of connecting separate bouts of hanging around. In fact, beyond hanging around, sampling various foods and ruminating with study participants in cafes and shops, walking often proved to be the most productive of ethnographic methods, providing both spatial sources of elicitation during walking interviews,⁴ but also the ideal tempo of activity for personally understanding the everyday human rhythms largely invisible to macro-urban theory: As Tim Ingold asserts “social relations, are not enacted in situ but are paced out along the ground.”⁵ Accordingly, walking around urban contexts yields particular insights into the interactions between the feet,

4 Andrew Clark and Nick Emmel, ‘Walking interviews: more than walking and talking?’ ESRC National Centre for Research Methods: Real Life Methods, *Vital Signs Conference*, September 2008

5 Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst, *Ways of Walking* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008).

noses, ears and lungs of city dwellers, through which social relations are paced out.⁶ Walking is, of course, hardly a new method in the ethnographic tool kit, and has had some what of a revival over recent years. Sarah Pink has gone so far as to recently herald walking, and walking-with-study participants, as *the* ethnographic method to provide the researcher with the ability to “imagine how others might be emplaced in the world.”⁷ Rachel Lichtenstein makes a similar argument, advocating walking as a methodology for historical research, arguing that it is possible to ‘see and feel history’ through walking in “the footsteps of former” city inhabitants.⁸

Certainly, walking as a method is one way in which, as Loïc Wacquant puts it “that the sociologist” is able to “submit himself to the fire of action in situ; [and] put his own organism, sensibility, and incarnate intelligence at the epicentre of the... forces he intends to dissect.”⁹

Walks reveal the unconscious thinking undertaken by the body, with subtle shifts in changes in direction or speed alluding to the walker’s aversions, tendencies and desires. However, I can also testify that, contrary to Sarah Pinks’ experience, my experience of pedestrian immersion resulted in very few coincidences between my own, and others’ ways of making sense.

Certainly moving, smelling and tasting through the space with others, as well as simply hanging around with them, changed the way in which I made sense of the flavours and aromas that filled the field.¹⁰ Analogous processes of transformation may well also be true for the research participants. However, rather than enabling us to experience each other’s ways of

6 Tim Ingold and Jo lee Vergunst (ed.) *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 1.

7 Sarah Pink, “An Urban tour: The Sensory Sociality of Ethnographic Place-Making,” *Ethnography* 9, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 175-196.

8 Rachel Lichtenstein and Ian Sinclair *Rodinsky’s Room* (London: Granta 1997), 211.

9 Loïc Wacquant, *Body & Soul* (Oxford:Oxford University Press US, 2004), 8.

10 I did, for instance, despite an initial anxiety about even trying them, come to develop a real taste for jellied eels over the course of an ethnography, as well as the peculiar banter and chatter that accompanied their consumption. For more on this see the methodological appendix.

‘making sense,’ as Pink contends, the methods multisensory ethnography that I adopted opened up experiences *between* those of myself and the research participants. As Paul Stoller, writes “your experience... is the key to reducing distances between universes of meaning. As experience expands with time, the boundaries of universes may begin to intersect.”¹¹ However, although they are “permeable” to one another, even over a lifetime, universes of meaning never totally merge. The study participants, with whom I spent considerable time and for whom I continue to be a source of bewilderment, will be the first to testify to this. Accordingly, while walking is a key method within this ethnography, each step is taken with an awareness of the impossibility of walking in another’s ‘footsteps’, and the privilege it is to walk ‘alongside’.

Recording and Representing the ‘Other Senses’: Pictures

Despite enduring tendencies within urban sociology to relegate sensuous experiences to the background and appendices of sociological accounts,¹² a number of ethnographers have made substantial advances over recent decades in bringing them to the foreground. Utilising an array of multimedia research tools, including video,¹³ cinema, still photography¹⁴ and sound recording,¹⁵ urban researchers have started to record and analyse both the sonic and visual aspects of their ethnographic field in increasingly high definition. The expanding audio-visual literacy of both researchers, as well as their readers, viewers and listeners, has also

11 Paul Stoller, *The Power of the Between* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 30.

12 Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 280-308.

13 Christina Lammer (ed.) *CORPOrealities* (Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 2010).

14 Caroline Knowles, *Bedlam on the Streets* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000).

15 Les Back and John Drever *The London Ear* Goldsmiths College, October, 2005.
Michael Bull, *Sound Moves* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007).

opened up a space in which film, photography and sound recording are increasingly admissible as forms of ‘sociological telling’ themselves.¹⁶

The emergence of audio and visual modes of ethnography, is of course, related to the radical promulgation of technologies for recording, mediating and interrogating these particular sensory modalities. Equally, the relative absence of gustatory and olfactory orientated forms of ethnography is no doubt also correlated to the fact that no such equivalent technologies exist for flavours or aromas, the recording, analysis and manipulation of which still take place within very exclusive, and expensive, fields of expertise.¹⁷

The lack of accessible recording and recoding techniques for taste and smell is, of course, a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the lack of such technologies has, so far, saved these senses from the “computer based metastasis” that Jean Baudrillard contends has colonised the experience of vision and audition.¹⁸ It does, however, mean that, when it comes to practising ethnography, the nuances of aromatic and gustatory experience are less easy to record. This is one of the reasons that ‘being there,’ and having all senses ‘switched on’, takes on a particular importance in a multisensory ethnography. Even the deep immersion of the researcher’s body into the sensoria of the research field, however, is of little help when it comes to actually representing the olfactory and gustatory composition of space, and communicating the sensations evoked by it.

16 Howard S. Becker, *Telling About Society*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2007).
Caroline Knowles and Paul Sweetman, *Picturing the Social Landscape* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004).
Mitchell Duneier and Ovie Carter, *Sidewalk* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

17 Luca Turin, *The Secret of Scent* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007).

18 Jean Baudrillard and Chris Turner, *Cool Memories IV* (London: Verso, 2003), 103

That is not, however, to suggest that there are no ways to both record and represent the multisensory ‘texture’ of this ethnographic field, and the experience of it, to the reader: David Macdougall, for instance, contends that audio-visual films and video provide one of the best ways to stimulate an embodied form of understanding in the reader/viewer.¹⁹ Similarly, although often thought of as mono-sensory media, I also want to argue that still photography has a limited utility as a poly-sensory recording device, and representational practice. Brian Massumi suggests that “all the sense modalities are active in the most mono-sensual of activities,”²⁰ and draws on several experiments that seem to substantiate Goethe’s contention that “the hands want to see, the eyes want to caress.” Certainly, a still photograph of a bowl of quivering jellied eels, or a crumbling red London brick, is felt as much in the finger tips as it is seen with the eye. This relationship between vision and tactility is only one of the more obvious examples of everyday synaesthesia elicited by a photograph. There are, however, as any good food photographer intuitively knows, also analogous connections between visual representations and taste.²¹

Although perhaps not as obviously as a smell or a taste, photographic images are fully able to rekindle synaesthetic memories and associations. Accordingly, and partially following Steven Feld’s insistence that multisensory ethnography should not become ‘anti-visual’ ethnography, still photography has been used constantly throughout this ethnography: primarily for the production of personal *aide-memoirs* (alongside soundscape recordings), but also, more

19 David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

20 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 140.

21 A. N. Gilbert, R. Martin, and S. E. Kemp, “Cross-modal correspondence between vision and olfaction: the color of smells,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 109, no. 3 (1996): 335–351.

sparingly, for use as a way of ‘telling’ about the experience of the sensuous ambiances that are being discussed.²²

I say ‘used sparingly’ because, despite its utility as an *aide-memoir* and synaesthetic stimulus, photography is still a representational practice weighted towards the recollection and representation of the visible. Despite photography’s synaesthetic qualities, truly multisensory ethnography also requires less visual or aurally stimulating recording devices and representational practices: media suited to capturing and translating the myriad olfactory inflections that characterise an urban street market on an early May morning. In absence of mobile machinery for chromatographic analysis and the lack of laboratories with which to create impressionistically scented paper, the most obvious tool for the recording and re-presentation these sensuous experiences remains language: a mode of representation which itself is not without significant limitations.

Recording and Representing the Other Senses: Words

In his essay *The Grain of the Voice* Roland Barthes meditates on the activity of transcribing sound into text.²³ Although a linguistic translation is possible, the semiotician suggests, language tends to do “very badly.” As hard as transcribing sounds and audition into text might be for Barthes, the difficulty would seem to be compounded when trying to translate the experiences of gustation and olfaction into words; of which most modern languages are particularly ill equipped to write and talk about. The only English words immediately available for discussing and describing the experience of taste and smell, are, for instance,

²² Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, *Senses of Place, Illustrated Edition*. (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1998). Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009).

²³ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), 179.

either emotive and clumsy adjectives – ‘repulsive, fragrant, pleasant, pungent,’ – or undescriptive nouns-cum-adjectives that identify the object being considered; “this orange both tastes and smells very orangey.” The paucity of language for ‘telling’ about these particularly sensuous aspects of experience would seem to chime with David MacDougall’s contentions regarding the “incommensurability of sensory experiences and anthropological writing.”²⁴

However, there are, as Pink contends in her overview of multisensory ethnographic methods, still “good reasons for writing.”²⁵ For a start, the protocols and dogmas of ethnographic writing are well understood by readers, who are increasingly capable of maintaining an awareness of the limitations of language, and of reading between the lines of thick description. Moreover, some of the apparent limitations of text and languages’ can also be significant advantages: For example; noun-cum-adjectives can be the ideal linguistic tools for translating the materiality of a given sensory landscape into an intelligible form, as long as the description works within the sensory repertoire of the reader. Moreover, language also provides a separate set of tools for the description of the emotional and physical responses to that landscape. In fact, despite what Michel Serres notes as the apparent lack of sensuousity in much sociological writing on embodied experience,²⁶ text can provide the ideal media for representing both the materiality and experience of various sensory stimuli. This is, of course, a fact that has long been noted by novelists, poets, wine tasters and food critics alike, whose use of olfactory and gustatory description and allusion is far less inhibited than a sociologist’s.

However, while wine tasters and novelists might want to deliberately plait descriptions of

24 David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 60.

25 Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009), 136.

26 Michel Serres, Stephen Connor (trans.), *The Five Senses*, (London, Birkbeck College, 1999). <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/5senses.htm>. Accessed 12-04.2008.

materiality of the world with their emotional responses to it, the added task of conducting and writing multisensory ethnography involves maintaining an awareness of this distinction, both in my own experience, and those of others.

Beyond mere sensory awareness, multisensory ethnography entails a commitment to theoretically interrogating moments where slippage occurs between description of ‘that which is sensible,’ and the meaning attributed to the ‘object’ of sensory attention. Such interrogation, is for instance, essential where the reference to ‘rotting fruit’ is used to connote both a particular smell, but also to normalise a negative emotional response to the spatial and social context of its encounter.²⁷ Naturally, language still falls short of accurately representing both the multisensory nuances of the ethnographic field, and the complexity of personal responses to it. However, textual description still enables a partial translation of the sensuous ethnographic field; and remains the best tool to hand for developing and communicating an understanding of the relationship between the senses and social formation in urban space.

Before going on to introduce the reader to the poly-sensory locations in which the ethnography was conducted, and ‘showing’ the types of ethnographic representation that are going to be deployed, I would like first to briefly discuss some of the ethical and practical decisions taken in light of the chosen methodologies.

Disclosure and The Right to be Represented

The statement of ethical practice issued by the British Sociological Association states quite emphatically that the “anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process

²⁷ For more on this particular allusion see chapter four.

should be respected.” By which they mean “kept confidential” and that all information (such as details about location and time) be “distorted” so as to remove any information that might make participants identifiable.²⁸ In many ethnographic fields this is a largely unproblematic exercise. Indeed, it has been possible, using a standard set of protocols, to anonymise many of the voices that appear throughout this thesis.²⁹ This has served to protect both myself, and participants, between whom large amounts of personal information was bilaterally disclosed. The shrouds of anonymity have not, however, been draped evenly throughout this study. For instance, and as you will see in the map later in this chapter, the locations in this study are far from anonymous. Moreover neither are all of the participants in this study, with several of the main figures speaking under their own names.

It would be disingenuous however, to suggest that the decisions taken with regards to disclosure were purely the result of ethical deliberations. Rather, the modes of anonymity and naming that are deployed are equally the result of deliberations over practicalities, as well as considerations with regards to the genres of writing that this thesis strives to emulate. Firstly it is important to note that the precise combinations of flavours, aromas and sensoria that characterise the field of this ethnography are crucial to arguments made within it. It is important then, that these locales and their peculiar aromatic landscapes and gustatory topography are as faithfully represented as possible. If this were a thesis on visual landscapes, or soundscapes, it would of course, be possible, if undesirable, to utilise an array of anonymising techniques to distort photographs, sound recordings and voices. However, while it might be possible to faithfully anonymise visual or sonic representations of ‘the field’, olfactory and gustatory representations, even if only textual, are far harder to anonymise:

28 <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm> (accessed 13/04/2008)

29 Andrew Clark *Anonymising Research Data* Real Life Methods Working Paper, University of Leeds, December 2006.

Owing to the molecular specificity of a particular space's olfactory and gustatory ambience, various combinations of smells and tastes are also very strong indicators of very specific locations. Following their nose, if not other clues, it would be quite easy for anybody who knows east London, to quickly identify many of the places that feature in this study. Moreover, and perhaps this is one of the most important factors, the decision about whether to disclose or not, is also a decision about accountability. As Mitch Duneier writes, while in journalistic accounts of urban life sources and locations are disclosed to hold the writers up to the claims they make, ethnographers often 'get away' without leaving any traceable footsteps.³⁰ With this in mind, this ethnography is written up with a commitment to enabling the reader to retrace at least some, of my footsteps, and a commitment to representing the field as faithfully as possible.

Similar rationales can be offered for the decision not to anonymise several of the people that you will meet over the coming pages. For example: Paul, the owner of a seafood stand, Ali, the aforementioned trader from Ridley Road market, and Dickson, a neighbouring trader all speak under their own names. Of course, having disclosed the identities of the places being researched, these individuals are all easy to identify. They also, however, keep their names following explicit requests to do so, having turned down offers of anonymity.³¹ But more importantly, and to reiterate an earlier point, by naming study participants, I am made infinitely more accountable for the words that I attribute to them: answerable to both the participants, and the reader who is now free to meet them.

30 Mitchell Duneier and Ovie Carter, *Sidewalk* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 348.

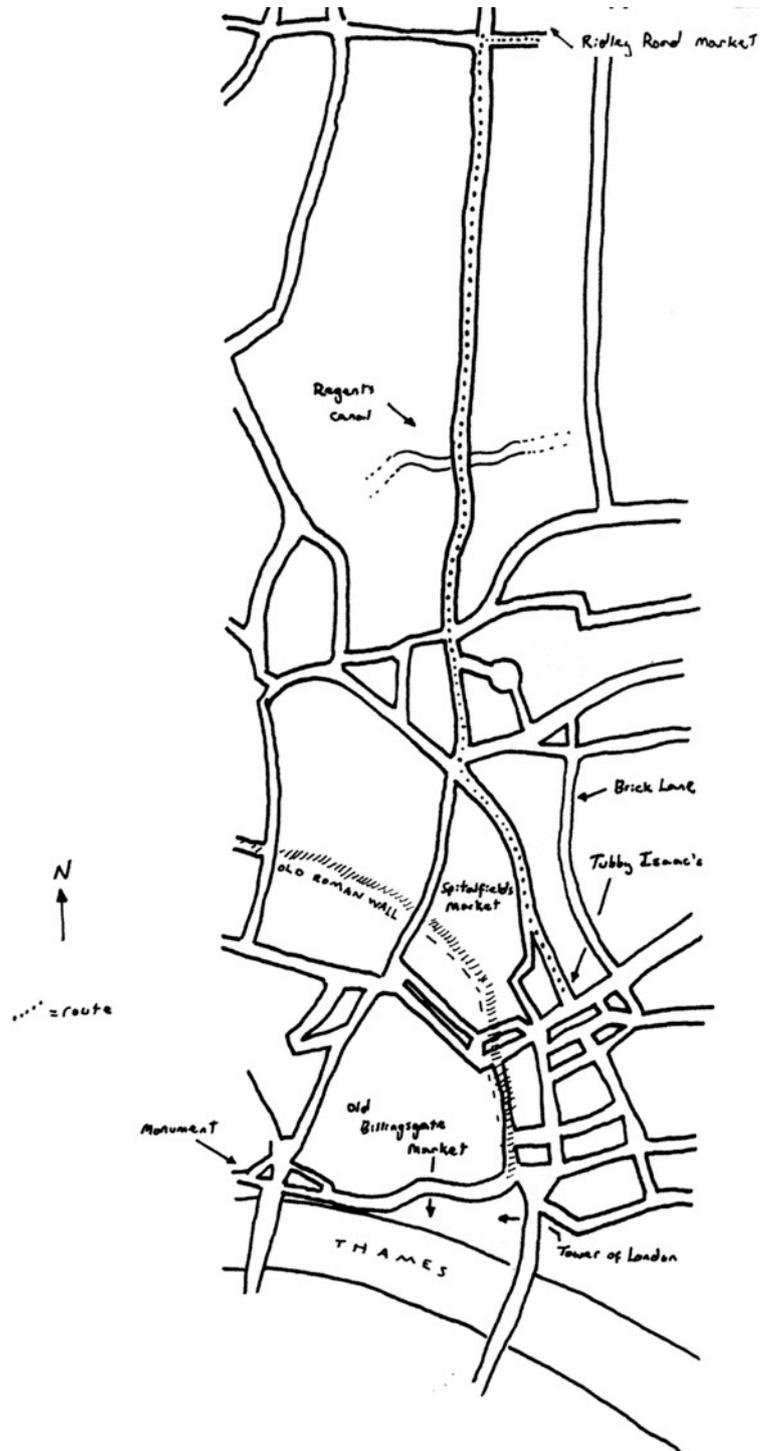
Of course, the journalistic protocols with regards to disclosure differ across national contexts. British journalists, for instance are far less likely to disclose their sources identities than French or Americans who write within a stronger tradition of accountability.

31 No doubt this is partially because, those who explicitly requested being named were generally self-employed traders and producers, and saw my interest in their lives as an opportunity to promote their business. I certainly do not object to this ethnography being used as a vehicle for their publicity, and see a degree of reciprocity in it serving as such.

None of this is to say, however, that the aforementioned people and places in this study appear unprotected. Rather, ethical issues concerning disclosure have been constantly negotiated and worked out collaboratively with the participants in this study. Those who specifically wavered anonymity, were handed drafts of relevant chapters during the process of writing to ensure that statements and scenes were faithfully represented and that no inappropriate lines were crossed. Other aspects about their lives that they were happy to reveal to me, I have also omitted, cutting transcribed conversations short and changing small details for the sake of both participants, and my own, privacy and safety. In these respects, the empirical chapters that follow are the culmination of a negotiation between ethics protocols, everyday concerns, practical considerations and a commitment to representing the fine grain of people and places as faithfully as possible and making those representations checkable. Baring these commitments in mind, as well as the methods that I sketched above, it now serves to provide a brief introduction to the spatial and historical context of the field of this study: an introduction conducted by way of a short, poly-sensory stroll through and between the key ethnographic sites.

Locations

Now integrated into the urban centre of London, prior to the sixteenth century the area around Petticoat Lane market was little more than a cluster of fields, burial pits and tanneries, bisected by a hog driving path that traced the outer edge of the city wall. By the seventeenth century, however, London had spilled out of its wall into the area around the hog driving track, which swelled with warehouses and small factories processing cotton, leather and silks. Between new industrial buildings sprung rows of terraced slum dwellings and bloomed the stalls and traders that came to constitute Petticoat Lane Market. By its pinnacle in the middle of the nineteenth century,



Map of walk through study area, author's own composition

described vividly in the poly-sensory prose of Henry Mayhew, the market consisted of several crowded miles of stalls and vendors clustered around Middlesex Street, and weaving east along Wentworth Street and southward down Goulston Street.³² However, changing retail habits and demography in the area over the last half century, have lead to the contraction of market stalls further and further northward up from its erstwhile southern extremity, today, leaving only the rusty frames of empty market stalls behind them. Although a largely deserted street, Goulston Street is not entirely empty.

A young woman approaches Goulston Street's south eastern corner, walking fast towards a university building with an entrance further up the street. She's late for an eleven o'clock lecture, but takes time to arrange her scarf and hold it up to her nose as she passes through the aromas the congregate at Goulston Street's southern end: By and large these aromas are characterised by the brackish essence of near coastal waters, inflected with hints of fish flesh, malt vinegar, and petrol from passing traffic. The majority of this smell emanates from Goulston Street's most permanent fixture; a lone, white seafood trailer.

'Tubby Isaac's', has been on the same street, at the same 3ft by 6ft pitch, since Itzko Brenner, a portly (tubby) Jewish Russian migrant, first started selling jellied eels at the nearby market in 1919. Whilst apparently offensive to many of those that pass it, for many of its patrons the essences of the stand are taken to be 'authentic essences' of the London's 'East End'. Today the stand is open five days a week³³, between 11:00am and 11:00pm, and sells a shifting range of seasonal seafood as well as cockles, whelks, prawns, jellied eels, herring, mussels and surimi,

³² Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopaedia of Conditions and Earnings Vol. 1*, (London: Griffin Bone and Company 1851), 38-40.

³³ When this ethnography started, the stand was initially open for seven days a week.

year round.³⁴ We will return to this trailer a number of times through this thesis: in chapter three to explore the disgust directed at it, and in chapter six to explore the sensory ambience of its patrons everyday lives. For now, however, I would like to say something more about the spatial context in which it is embedded, as an understanding of this context is integral to understanding the meanings attributed to the seafood stand, and emotions stirred by the flavours and aromas that shroud it.

At the other end of Goulston Street, about 200 metres north of Tubby Isaac's, are the rumbling diesel generators that power Petticoat Lane's modest 'food court': A cluster of six or seven white food trailers selling an array of fish cakes, barbecue ribs, battered sweet and sour chicken balls, egg noodles, beef stews, lamb kebabs and curries. Contrary to the near absence



Petticoat Lane 'food court', July 2008, author's photograph

of customers around Tubby Isaac's at the southern end of the street, each of these stalls convenes a small queue, the longest usually for one the two stalls selling Thai food.

³⁴ Surimi is a form of reconstituted white fish first popularised in Japan and a great success at the stand and else where in Britain from the 80s onwards, in the form of crab sticks, 'ocean-pinks' and lobster tails.

This aromatic heptagon marks the new southern edge of Petticoat Lane market, the majority of the market activity having retracted northward away from Tubby Isaac's. Beyond the 'food court' are the main stalls of the market, positioned on a junction of new global trade circuits and the furrows of the market's rag trading past: dresses, suits, ties and T-shirts, and behind them rows of lock-up units specialising in an array of luminous 'traditional African' fabrics and wraps. The most esteemed of these fabrics, which are a peculiar mix of South Asian printing practices, West African tradition and Western modernity are "manufactured in Holland," with cheaper versions coming from Taiwan and China. Having been, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a predominantly Jewish run market, many, although not all of Petticoat Lane's fabric and clothes shops are now owned and run by traders whose parents traced the trade routes of Empire, from Pakistan to London. The customer base of these shops and the bulk of the market's most regular visitors, however, are West Africans from across London and the south east. While lots of the activity at the street market is retail, bulk is also frequently purchased from the lock-up units behind the stalls. The fabric retailers have a symbiotic relationship with the market's numerous luggage retailers, who provide the suitcases and trunks into which the masse purchases are bundled before being taken to cargo dealers packaged, taped up and sent on to Nigeria, Ghana and other locations across West Africa. Moving northward further still, the northern extremities of the market are marked by a familiar smell from across east London: oregano, hints of lemon disinfectant, and above all, hot oil: an aroma that pre-empt the shuffling of six or seven young men out of 'The Chicken Run'. "These guys," Sukdev Sandhu suggests, "are Cockneys by geography and in self-image too."³⁵ One-time children of the first, second and third generations of Bengali settlers regularly effectuate a possession over a handful of the streets around Petticoat Lane via a routine occupation of the asphalt, and, by inscriptions made on the surrounding panels and

35 Sukhdev Sandhu. "Come Hungry, Leave Edgy;" *London Review of Books* V25, 19, N9 October 2003.

shutters. The full extent of the “territory,” across which they extract occasional “taxes,”³⁶ is nearly isomorphic with the distance that the smell of fried chicken osmoses.

The northern extremity of Petticoat Lane, is marked by new tarmac glowing in the opulent light of a recently opened couture hairdresser: “Ladies cuts: £120”: less a part of Petticoat Lane, the result of a regeneration initiative that defines the area to the markets north. This initiative although not the focus of this study, is important to briefly mention as its existence is relevant to the manner in which many people perceive Ridley Road Market and Petticoat Lane. Moreover the emergence of this patch of urban regeneration is also relevant to the possible futures that await both of the markets studied in this ethnography. The centrepiece of the area to the immediate north of Petticoat Lane, of which the couture hairdresser is properly part, is the newly refurbished and deceptively renamed ‘Old Spitalfields Market’. Built on top of nursery gardens that once housed an abbey and hospital from which the space derives its name, Spitalfields Market has been in operation since the post-fire re-structuring of the London of the late seventeenth century.³⁷ Once known as London’s premier ‘potato and fruit market,’³⁸ the recent regeneration of Spitalfields market and the streets around it started in the late 1980s with the removal of the olfactory landscape that was attached to the selling and storing of fruit and vegetables. As a fruit market, and its congested poly-aromatic activity has passed into memory, many of the clattering sweatshops that surrounded the market also went quieter, and the Huguenot weavers’ workshops were ‘restored’ to residential use. Today these are amongst the most expensive residential properties in Europe,³⁹ and surround a ‘market’ lined with high end boutiques and re-odourised with lattes, bouquets, salads and

36 Ali, the ‘Tax-Man,’ in conversation with author, October 2008.

37 F.H.W. Sheppard, *Survey of London: volume 27*, 1957, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=50164>.

38 John Weale *A New Survey of London*, 1853, vol. II, p. 127-147.

39 Judith Heywood, “Old Spitalfields workshop sells for £3.75m,” *The Times* (UK), December 15, 2009, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/money/property_and_mortgages/article6956615.ece. Accessed 16 December 2009.

cheese. Certainly remarkably changed, the transformation of ‘Old Spitalfields Market’ is considered, by many, to be an exemplary piece of urban regeneration, saving the market from the under investment and dilapidation that characterise neighbouring Petticoat Lane and Ridley Road Markets. Moreover, Spitalfields, and a handful of recently ‘saved’ markets in London, provide a model with which to think about the development of those less polished markets. The displacement of local amenities, pricing out of local residents, increased rents for traders and the development of a fiercely policed private space around the market,⁴⁰ however, have led many more to question the public success of the development.⁴¹

To fully explore the relevance of this space to Ridley Road market, we have to get there first. Accordingly we skip quickly up Commercial Street, through Shoreditch and past the string of bars that sustain the symbiosis of the area’s creative economy and property boom, past the clusters of Sino-Vietnamese eateries and Turkish-Cypriot grocers, up Kingsland Road to arrive at Dalston Junction.

Prevailing Breezes

In the past the prevailing westerly winds and currents moving across London, left the area around Petticoat Lane languishing in the miasmic shadow of the west. The congestion and concentration of tanneries, furnaces and markets in the streets only added to the area’s distinct aromatic signatures. In contrast, however the winds that brushed across the slightly

40 Neither local, young London born Bengalis, nor the many homeless people that dwell in the area, are effectively allowed into the new market and are regularly harassed or chased by the market’s security staff.

41 Jane Jacobs and Raphael Samuels are amongst the many urbanists and historians that extensively detailed the early stages of regeneration in this space, and developed critiques of the neo-colonial imaginary and corporate agendas, that have shaped the market area into its contemporary form. See:

Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*, (London, New York: Routledge, 1996).

Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1996).

Raphael Samuel, *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain* (London: Verso, 1999).

more northerly approach to Ridley Road arrived from a largely rural landscape.⁴²

Accordingly, those wealthier city dwellers wishing to escape the olfactory clamour of the city's eastern edges, would journey up Kingsland Road, northwards, towards Dalston Junction "for the ayre."⁴³ Related to its clean air and distance from the city, the area also hosted a concentration of almshouses, nonconformist academies, and one of the city's first private



Geffrye Museum, a former alms house, July 2008, author's photograph

schools for

'young ladies'.

While it remained a popular area with 'well off' Londoners, the laying of two railway lines and the carving of the Regent's Canal across Kingsland Road in the nineteenth century also precipitated the erection of wharfs, factories and homes for workers in the area, precipitating the emergence of a dual economy in the locality, as well as changes to the olfactory ambience. While there remains a small industrial presence in the area – largely garment producers and food processing – by the beginning of the twenty-first century, most of the industry, and the

⁴² Felix Barker and Peter Jackson, *The History of London in Maps* (London:Cross River Press, 1992).

⁴³ J. S. Cockburn et al., *A History of the county of Middlesex Volume 10: Hackney* (Oxford: Institute of Historical Research by Oxford University Press, 1995), 10-14.

Samuel Pepys, John Warrington, Henry B. Wheatley *The Unabridged Diary of Samuel Pepys* (London: Hayes Barton Press, 1902), 1394.

fog it precipitated, has migrated both else where in London and overseas. One of the results of the migration of industry is that the difference between the social classes in the area has been exacerbated, with the area now hosting both the most educated and mobile populaces in London (often living in factories, wharfs and workshops converted to residential use) ,while at the same time, housing one of the densest concentrations of un-employment and poverty related ill-health.⁴⁴ A further consequence of the migration of industry has been a shift in the area's olfactory landscape and gustatory topography, no longer that of rurality, nor of industrial London. Now a main road into London, the fumes from cars, buses and lorries moving along Kingsland Road through Dalston commingle with the smells and flavours that have been sedimented by decades of workers in the area: Faulkners Fish and chips, The Hindu Cafe, Restaurant Jeito Brasilerios; the nose tingling pollen of the Dalston Florist, a warm dry smell of hot hair and shampoo from 'Basic Looks Barbers', the saccharine smell of acetone and nail polish from 'The Nail Studio', as well as the taste of the stale beer and cigarette ash that lines the entrance of Dalston Snooker Centre. In contrast to the beiges and browns of nearby Spitalfields market, the visual landscape of the area is characterised by bright complimentary colours: Yellow on blue, green on red, purple on orange, orange on purple. The walkers on narrow pavements are hemmed in with steel barriers and forced through narrow funnels past a cluster of policemen and privately contracted 'search' specialists, whose outfits are brighter still than the signage behind them. Together they conduct daily stop and search exercises on passing cars, pedestrians and cyclists under section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

44 This pattern is reflected especially clearly in data on educational achievement, which is polarised in the extreme. See: Neighbourhood Statistics, *Dalston Ward*
<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=7&b=6155326&c=dalston&d=14&e=5&g=333936&i=1001x1003x1004&m=0&r=1&s=1271260048609&enc=1&dsFamilyId=103> accessed October 2006

Behind them there is a break in the colour signage where a street, perpendicular to Kingsland Road intersects. The intersecting street is full of crumpled bodies, pushchairs and old market barrows. On each side of the street there is a lining of green, blue and white striped tarpaulins. This road is Ridley Road, and the market it plays home to is the second of two locations focused on in this study.

Approaching the market, two local teenage girls appear within ear shot

“Let’s go through the market... It’s quicker.”

“I don’t want to go through the stinking market. Why’d you want to do that?”

“You’re right. C’mon...”

For centuries the main market in the Dalston area, about a mile or two north of London, occupied Kingsland Road itself, filling up much of the road. In the early twentieth century, with the establishment of an electric tramline along Kingsland Road, the market migrated from the main road (Kingsland Road) up on to Ridley Road.⁴⁵ Officially designated as a market in 1926, Ridley Road received several pages of description in Mary Bendetta’s 1938 publication, *London Markets*. Bendetta’s description of the market in the 1930s is particularly notable for its account of the friendly antagonisms that exist between the market’s various traders, market inspectors and customers. She also notes “plenty of bargains, besides a good variety of wares, and... a great deal of spontaneous entertainment.”⁴⁶ Moving through the contemporary market it is possible to find many traces of market Bendetta describes. As in Bendetta’s market, inspectors can be witnessed treading a fine line between allowing traders to breathe, and responding to instructions from the town hall. There is also, as in Bendetta’s

45 Sheila Taylor and Oliver Green, *The Moving Metropolis: The History of London’s Transport Since 1800* (London: Laurence King Publishing 2001).

46 Mary Bendetta, (1932) *The Street Markets of London* (London: Blom 1972) 137-140.

account, a great deal of ‘spontaneous entertainment,’ as traders mock each other, converse about the day’s events, make plans for the weekend while trying to subtly orchestrate their customers movements and actions. Bakers, butchers, fishmongers, pharmacists, hardware stalls and greengrocers all endure from the market’s genesis, some under the stewardship of families whose faces may have been familiar to Bendetta. Yet what is most remarkable about the market is less the endurance of its old institutions, than the changes that have occurred within them, beneath the cloak of continuity.

“It’s a very cosmopolitan area, Dalston.”

“Oh yeah, that’s why this market’s survived, we got a catchment of customers that come from cultures that are market based, and they will use a street market... While other great London markets have failed, Ridley Road is still thriving and that’s the one reason. When I was a boy, on the salad stall we only had indoor round lettuce, celery – which was dirty and we had to wash down on a Sunday, and er, mustard and cress... And now there is a vast load of stuff to sell all times of the year. People are coming up all the time and asking for stuff that even I’ve never heard of.”⁴⁷

As Freddie, the ‘governor’ of a long established vegetable stall suggests, the enduring success of Ridley Road is largely attributable to the ever shifting wares of the market’s grocery stalls; adapting according to the palates arriving from across north Europe, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, South East Asia, Turkey, Vietnam and West Africa: Migrants, dislocated from home by economic and political pressure pulled toward Dalston where they satisfy the city’s demand for cheap labour, and where they use the market to satisfy their longing for a sense of familiarity amidst dislocation. Moreover – and contrary to the popular idea of east London as a site that migrants move into, then out of – no migratory wave, nor its attendant culture, has entirely washed away the next, and none has fully retreated when tides change. The sensoria

⁴⁷ Freddie, *Millenium Memory Bank* The British Library, Recorded in 1999
<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/text-only/england/hackney-contemporary/> accessed May 2008.

of once disparate lifeworlds have been firmly deposited in the space of the market, and tastes for them commingle as sediments on the bodies of markets users. Without a doubt, like Petticoat Lane, a local culture endures at the market. However, it is not a culture in the sense of a fixed set of artefacts enduring despite global flows. Rather, what endures is a set of local practices, protocols and sensibilities that allow for the layering and blending of transnational culture.

Having completed a brief historical and geographical contextualisation, we will return to Ridley Road, its flavour-laden landscape and the multicultural it sustains in multisensory detail across chapters four and five. The following chapter, however, returns to Petticoat Lane and Tubby Isaac's seafood stand in order to start developing a framework for understanding the interaction between sensory experiences and various forms of gendered, class-inflected and racialised forms of social stratification.

Slime and Reason: Gut Feelings and Social Stratification



Tubby Isaac's, March 2008, (author's photograph)

This section is comprised of two chapters, each focusing on one of the two locations introduced in the previous chapter, Tubby Isaac's Seafood Stand and Ridley Road market respectively. Through a consideration of the interaction between 'sensoria' and 'sensibilities' observed and experienced in these locations, the following two chapters trace the historically bequeathed multisensory architecture of racialised, gendered and economically stratified social spaces. The current chapter's focus lies in the identities and social forms that are articulated in relation to the smell, taste and texture of Tubby Isaac's Seafood Stand in Tower Hamlets; in particular the reciprocal relationship between multisensory disgust, and, both gendered and socio-economic forms of social stratification. The chapter that follows will turn its nose towards sensory experience as it relates to the reproduction of race and the articulation of racism in and around Ridley Road Market.

We begin with a return to Tubby Isaac's.

A black taxi cab with a small St George's flag in the back window turns into the southern end of Goulston Street, moving the wrong way up a one-way street. The driver parks his car carefully in a spot opposite Tubby Isaac's. Kicking the door open, he slowly eases himself out. He is of medium build, about five feet and eight inches tall, and wide only at the point where the buttons on his jacket visibly strain under the task of holding back his gut. He wears small metal-rimmed glasses of medium thickness and is about forty-five years old, although having been sitting in his cab for hours looks considerably older as he makes a short hunched walk from the car over to the stand. Aside from myself and the three couples who had previously stopped to ask for directions to Brick Lane and Spitalfields, the stand has been empty for about twenty minutes. The driver shuffles towards the stand, spine still curved. However, upon reaching it, he places two thick hands on the steel counter in front of him, and in one deep inhalation, rolls back his shoulders and smoothly lifts his chin towards the vendor, who stands about half a metre above his eye line.

"Alright there Tubby. Still killin' them Chinese?"¹

The vendor (Paul, not Tubby), faintly smiles a smile to suppress a double cringe – an attempt to create distance from a distasteful joke that, if overheard, stands to cast both the teller and receiver in bad light. In this case the joke is at the expense of twenty-one Chinese migrants who drowned farming cockle beds in northwest England in the winter of 2004.

Paul nods a 'Hello,' with his eyebrows raised, before adding "You know that those Chinese were farming exports to Spain?"

1 In February, 2004, Yu Hui, Chen Muyu, Guo Nianzhu, Lin Zhifang, Xu Yuhua, Wu Jianzhen, Wu Hongkang, Xie Xiaowen, Lin Guohua, Guo Binglong, Zhou Xunchao, Lin Guoguang, Cao Chaokun, Guo Changmau, Yang Tianlong, Lin Lishui, Wang Minglin, Lin Youxing, Chen Aiqin, Zhang Xiuhu and Wang Xiuyu were killed picking cockles in the tides of Morecambe Bay, Lancashire. The notorious tides were however, only the executors, their fate being determined initially by the closure of several cockle fisheries around the coast in 2003, a response to bacterial control measures. This in turn led to a sudden scramble for Morecambe Bay's cockles which had previously only been sporadically fished. Realising the likely high price to be paid for cockles in Europe, Spanish-owned dredging and cargo boats were quickly dispatched to start cleaning out the cockle beds on an industrial scale. However, under restrictions that deemed such large boats unsuitable for the bay, fishing 'gangs' were soon mobilized to dredge up the molluscs, loading them on to the boats which were now used as carriers. While there had always been a small group of locally born cockle pickers and fishermen in the bay, competition arrived in the form of Chinese and Eastern European cockling gangs. Un-policed in the pre-dawn sands of an increasingly deserted stretch of coastline, conflict and sabotage ensued between the gangs and local residents for two years. Whether or not such conflict directly resulted in the deaths of the Chinese cockle pickers remains an unanswered question. The owners of the company in charge of the vessels were charged but these charges were quickly dropped. A Chinese gangmaster was successfully charged with negligence and subsequently lost his license. Details of the deaths and the charges are widely available through the mainstream press. For a very interesting account of the shift in fishing practices at Morecambe bay that occurred two years before these deaths see:

Jeffrey Andrews, 'Sands of Change, Portrait of the Cockle fishery in Morecambe Bay November 2002 - October 2003' *Shellfish News* (16 2003), 21-24.

I nod and scribble.

The customer seems not to have listened, or chooses to pretend he has not. He glances over the vendor's shoulder at the fuzzy news footage playing on the small portable television that sits at the back of the stand. The footage is of the Olympic Torch relay, proceeding through London for the Beijing Games, and the camera focuses on the wrestling to the ground of pro Tibetan protesters. "I see that they're removin' the pirate DVD sellers off the street again."

A small laugh is exhaled from the chest of the vendor towards his customer.

"I'll 'ave a medium bowl of eels to eat here, and a dressed crab to take home please."

Paul warms to the customer a little more.

"Hundred pound, minimum spend today."

This time a more substantial chuckle is shared.

Having been handed the eels in a small porcelain bowl over the high counter, the customer places it on the steel shelf at his waist and pours chilli vinegar over the eels until the bowl overflows. He picks the bowl back up, and hunching over it with a small plastic fork, starts shovelling the eel pieces one by one into his mouth, at first spilling jelly and dark brown vinegar from the over full bowl on to the grimy pavement beneath him. For the next five minutes the only noises he makes are satisfied grunts and snuffles, breaking only to straighten his back and glance over the vendor's shoulder to the crackling footage on the TV screen each time he needs to spit out an eel bone, before re-hunching over the bowl.

A couple, male and female, walk past the stall, and pause briefly behind the cab driver guzzling his eels.

The male half of the couple points enthusiastically at the display of molluscs and herring and says something inaudible. The woman curls her lip and tugs at her partner's elbow. They walk away.

Having sucked all of the flesh from the eel, and spat out the bones into a cardboard box beside the stand, the cab driver murmurs deeply, "Thanks Tubby, see you next time," before glancing back up at the television and remarking: "They'll get a shock when the torch comes down here... They'll all be crowding round it for some heat, or to light their reefer."

The largest laugh so far erupts between the vendor and his customer... I also try not to laugh, to remain removed from the exchange, but my shuddering shoulders give me away.

At this last laugh, the customer picks up the blue polytene bag in which the dressed crab is wrapped, turns, and walks back to his cab, his arm aloft in the air. "See ya, Tubby" he says, over his shoulder.

“Yeah, see ya,” says Paul, eyebrows once again raised. The customer eases himself back into the hermetically sealed security of his cab and, engine on, turns a famously tight circle in the road and drives back off the way he came.

I will work towards a consideration of those in the foreground of this ethnographic episode: the stand’s proprietors and patrons, as well as those unfortunate Chinese workers referenced in the customer’s story, towards the end of this chapter. This chapter begins its analysis, however, in the background of the scene, in particular with the female half of the couple, tugging at her partner’s elbow: Whether affected by the sight and smell of the glistening sea-fauna, offended by the xenophobic humour being expressed around the stand itself, or repulsed by the appearance of the stand’s patrons, the woman in question was far from the only individual to curl their lips at the seafood stand. The mere suggestion of the stand produced analogous responses in many people.

“What are you writing about?”

“At the moment... well er... seafood sort of.”

“Oh. I love seafood.”

“Really? Do you go to Tubby Isaac’s ever. You know, just down the road? The jellied eel stand.”

“Uuurgh.”

Her eyes scrunch closed, bottom lip turns outwards, arms are thrown down to her sides. Her fingers splay outwards. She shudders and pauses as I await explanation.

“No. no. That place? My mum and that like it all but ... S’dirty... I’ll take you to a real seafood restaurant...”

The above conversation was held with a bar manager working in a pub very close to Tubby Isaac’s. While I will return to this exemplary exchange throughout this chapter, it is the combination of the “uurgh” from the conversation above, and the curling lip and wrenching gut of the aforementioned couple, that constitute the main focus of what follows. These

gurgling utterances, which start in the pit of the stomach and are expressed through a combination of facial and corporeal contortions, are what, I will call from here on in, ‘squirms’. Over the following pages, and I will go on to explore what this squirm and others like it tell us about the relationship between sensory experiences, urban life and the production of gendered and socio-economic forms of social segmentation.

Of course, the squirms directed at the seafood stand are highly localised, and should only be understood as pertaining to one particular situation. However in revealing the interaction of the sensoria, sensibilities and social formation at this stand, I hope to provide the foundations of a framework for understanding socio-sensory interactions that can be carried forward into the following chapters. In order to do this, it serves to step back to more general theories of ‘disgust’ before considering the specific context out of which each squeamish episode occurs.

What Is In A Squirm?

In the conversation above which, as mentioned, was held with a very busy bar manager between pouring pints in a pub near Tubby Isaac’s, it did not seem possible to ask the questions that I wish I could have upon re-reading the transcript of the conversation I scribbled when I returned with my pint to the pub table. “Why do you, in particular, squirm at the thought of that place? Why do *you* consider it to be dirty? Why don’t you think its regular users think it is dirty? What does the difference between you and them tell me about the relationship between the senses, and social stratification in east London?”

Perhaps the dinner invitation would have led to opportunities to ask these, or similar questions. I did not, however, accept the invitation. Accordingly, I will start with the very brief

explanation for the squirm given by the study participant, and, in an attempt to sidestep the ethnographic fallacy, supplement it with appropriate forms of sociological interpretation. In the conversation above, the explanation offered by the bar manager was that the seafood stand is “..dirty.”

It is of course, Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger*, that provided what has been for nearly half a century, the leading anthropological account of dirt and the disgust it elicits. Dirt, for Douglas was not a real phenomenon, but rather a cultural construction, ‘matter out of place’.² I want to move on to a consideration of Douglas’s powerful and influential theory of ‘dirt’ in a short while. For now however, it serves to pause with the text that she chooses to critique in order to elaborate her theories of ‘dirt,’ The Old Testament. Coincidentally, the Old Testament offers an immediate and plausible explanation for the squirm: The menu on offer at Tubby Isaac’s. Oysters, cockles, whelks, eels, prawns, scampi, squid and mussels map almost perfectly on to the list of Mosaic prohibitions in Leviticus:

“Anything in the seas or rivers that has not fins and scales, of the swarming creatures that are in the waters, is an abomination to you. They shall remain an abomination to you, of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcass you shall have in abomination,”³

To adherents of Jewish, and Christian orthodoxy, everything excluding the herring and salmon sold at Tubby’s are an abomination to be avoided at all costs. Certainly theological prohibitions are relevant to the social history, and realities, of east London. From Benedictine fish Fridays of Catholic London, through the kosher butchers and bakers of twentieth century east London and halal gummy sweets sold to third generation east London-Bengalis on Brick

² Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002).

³ Leviticus, 11:10.

Lane, theological proscriptions have shaped and continue to shape where people go, what they eat and who they eat it with. Notably however, out of all of the ethnographic encounters that resulted in a squirm directed at Tubby Isaac's, only one was explained through an aversion that had theological roots, and even then in a paradoxical sense: The individual in question had eschewed the seafood stand, and others like it, all of his adult life, having been force fed fish as child, every Friday, at a Jesuit boarding school.⁴

Paradoxical effects aside, if it is not the theological dietary codes themselves that define the widely held aversion, then perhaps it is their enduring, underlying logic: For Kellog, quoted in Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* the origins of Mosaic prohibitions are to be found in what is referred to today as hygiene: a principle of rational cleanliness that, apparently, transcends time.⁵ This is a persuasive explanation, mapping on to dominant, contemporary understandings of how the body identifies and responds to dirt. In the dominant bio-medical understanding of 'dirt', the identification of dirt and the response of disgust are attributable to an objective biological "response [that] guard[s] the internal milieu from pathogens and their toxic products, a homeostatic self defence system... hard wired into our psyche."⁶ Accordingly, in the work of Kellog and in contemporary bio-medical explanations of disgust, the disgusting is understood as disgusting for a good reason, grounded in the perception of a 'real,' and not socially constructed danger. The same understanding of dirt and disgust is operationalised by marine scientists and the governments fisheries department who, at the time of writing, are attempting to answer why, "in the U.K. the general public often still perceive seafood as

4 Tubby Isaac himself, the Jewish coster that opened the stand in 1919 having fled persecution in Russia to arrive in England, chose explicitly to disregard religious doctrine in his new home. His choice of non kosher jellied eels as a means to make a living, like the meetings of Jewish anarchists over ham sandwiches in the same cosmopolitan context, suggest that theological and ethnological dietetics have a limited influence within certain cosmopolitan contexts.

5 H. Kellog in Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), 31.

6 Toronchuk, Judith A. and Ellis, George F. R. (2007) 'Disgust: Sensory Affect or Primary Emotional System?', *Cognition & Emotion*, 21:8,1799 — 1818

“risky.”⁷ Believing that dirt, disgust and the perception of risk are objective things, these researchers spend considerable resources conducting research into the phytoplankton blooms on which shellfish feed, looking for hidden toxins and threats.

Mary Douglas, however, carefully rejects Kellog's' assertion that the “abominable” is synonymous to the “unhygienic,” and discards the notion that Moses was in fact an “enlightened public health administrator.”⁸ She rejects it not, however, on the basis that the ‘primitives’ were too irrational to understand hygiene. Rather on the basis that the bio-medical notion of the “unhygienic” is probably more synonymous with a socially constructed notion of the abominable than biologists might admit. Put otherwise, for Douglas there is no such objective thing as dirt, or objective, reasonable disgust “except that which is [viewed through] a classificatory system in which it does not fit.” The Mosaic prohibitions, Douglas argues, can be understood according to the ambiguity of the abominable items in view of the prevalent classical classificatory systems (in this instance, whether an animal chewed cud or had cloven feet). Classificatory systems, Douglas argues, are important in that they ‘structure’ the way in which an individual perceives the world and makes sense out of the “chaos of shifting impressions” that falls on our senses. As Douglas argues, “we select from all stimuli falling on our senses only those that interest us, and our interests are governed by a pattern making tendency.”⁹ The patterns, or orders that Douglas argues we impose on the world are not, however, individualised or personal but rather given by “the public, standardised values of a community [which] mediate the experience of individuals.” Accordingly, for Douglas, when something is recognised by the senses as being ambiguous within that system, it poses a threat

7 Keith Davidson, Eileen Bresnan ‘Harmful Phytoplankton, Shellfish Poisoning and Human Health,’ *Shellfish News*, Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science Autumn Winter 2008

8 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), 37.

9 *Ibid.*,10

to the standing, not only of the classificatory system, but also the consistency of communal values. The response to that which “confuses or contradicts cherished [cultural] classifications,” is, accordingly, to collectively move the stimulus into an external category where it can be dealt with as disgusting, dirty and a pollutant to be kept outside of the body and culture.¹⁰ Perhaps most importantly, this particular squeamish response, which starts with a breach in cherished forms of order, signals that the contravened order has been refortified. This applies, Douglas argues, as much for contemporary experiences of dirt and disgust, as it did to what she calls, ‘primitive’ cultures.¹¹ Moreover, the idea has also been born out, and consistently tested, in a number of other theoretical arenas; most notably, combining elements of Douglas’ cultural theory, and psychoanalytic understanding of the ‘uncanny’¹² is the work of corporeal feminists such as Julia Kristeva and Elizabeth Grosz.¹³ For Kristeva the experience of what she coins “abjection” results from the intensity of a ‘things’ oscillation between, familiarity and unfamiliarity.

“It is... not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”¹⁴

To leave unchallenged foundational and embodied senses of self and other, Kristeva suggests, the body physically rejects anything that, in its ambiguity, threatens the experience of familiar

10 Ibid.,45.

11 It must be noted here that, in the preface to the recently republished *Purity and Danger*, the author acknowledges that in trying to decode the Mosaic prohibitions, she was “was out of [her] depth,” and in her focus on cloven footedness missed other, more complex way of categorising animals. That is not to say, however, that she abandons the theoretical framework. Despite her later caveats, Douglas holds on to the contention that the response to certain anomalous things serves to “shore up wavering certainty... [and] reduce intellectual and social disorder.” (Ibid., iv.)

12 Sigmund Freud, David McLintock, and Hugh Haughton, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

13 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994). 192-198

14 Julia Kristeva and Leon S. Roudiez, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York, Columbia University Press 1982), 4.

perceptual equilibrium. Accordingly, she writes, the “abject and abjection are my safe guards, the primers of my culture.”¹⁵

The word ‘culture’ here is particularly important: In Kristeva, and Douglas, a body makes sense of the world through the sensibility provided by its resident culture and the knowledges embedded in it.¹⁶ Accordingly, rather than reflecting personal orientation, or an objective response to dirt, squirms for them arise from socially acquired ways of categorising the world, and are understood to actively refortify the sense of order bequeathed by the body’s cultural context.

To return to the empirical case at hand, of course it is entirely conceivable that common recoiling at food sold at Tubby Isaac’s is attributable to an objective and biologically derived disgust: the embodied memory of sea fauna’s microbial agents and pathogens. Doubtlessly seafood can leave the consumer incapacitated, immobile and, on occasion dead. Bi-valve molluscs (oyster, cockles and molluscs) in particular, owing to the fact that they live off effluent algae, are occasionally prone to accumulate chemicals that are toxic to humans. Although the shellfish trade is one of the most routinely and thoroughly inspected industries in Britain (owing to its importance as an export), a bad cockle or a malevolent mussel doubtlessly slips the net somewhere.¹⁷ However it is worth noting that, despite my asking, no patrons of the stand spoke of any bad experience over the course of my ethnography, nor I did not once get ‘sick’ hanging around eating the stall’s oysters, cockles and jellied eels.

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002). 47.

¹⁷ Tubby Isaac’s is, it seems subject to more visits by professionally squeamish local health and safety officials than any other fast food vendor within the nearby food court. There were four visits that I was aware of in the time that I spent at the stand.

Following Mary Douglas' critique of Kellogg's "medical materialism,"¹⁸ it seems that when the policy makers at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs aim to establish why the British public see shellfish as "risky," they might first consider what deeply engrained symbolic orders seafood contravenes alongside efforts to monitor phytoplankton blooms on which the molluscs feed. If dirt and disgust is socially predicated in the way that Douglas and Kristeva's theories of dirt and abjection suggest, the answer to the question "why do *you* squirm at the seafood stand," lies in the following supplementary questions: What sorts of classificatory system does the fare sold at Tubby Isaac's contravene? What ways of perceiving the world characterise the sensibilities through which the seafood is experienced as abject? What types of order are reinforced through squirms directed at the stand? And what does this tell us about the relationship between sensory experience, identity and social formation in urban environments?

Epistemological Slipperiness

What sorts of classificatory system does the fare sold at Tubby Isaac's contravene? Firstly, it must be argued that on a general level, any flavour or smell has the potential to trigger a squirm. Smell and taste by their very modality, which involves the movement of a substance through bodily orifices, upset the dichotomy of a corporeal 'inside' and 'out.' As Elizabeth Grosz argues, the body's inside and out is a classificatory system that is incredibly important to

¹⁸ This is a concept that Douglas borrows from William James to describe the impulse to reduce dietary codes, and other social practices, to some kind of inbuilt biological mechanism. For more see: William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Plain Label Books, 1936), 28.

maintain within many social contexts, both in terms of a psychic ‘inner’ and ‘outer’¹⁹ self but also the physical inner and outer self.²⁰ It is possibly because food disrupts this foundational boundary that Kristeva claims that “food loathing is... the most elementary form of abjection.”²¹ Yet we know, by the fact that most of us eat everyday, that not all food induces this response. Rather, only the movement of certain tastes and textures into the mouth, or smells through the nose, result in abjection: A response grounded in the classificatory systems that structure the sensibilities of the squeamish.



Jellied Eels, Tubby Isaac's, May 2009, author's photograph

In order to approach an understanding of the classificatory systems disturbed by the seafood stand and its fare, I want to turn first to what seems to be its most abject component. While Tubby Isaac's, as a whole, evoked varying intensities of squirm, it was undoubtedly a singular

19 Erving Goffman provides an account of the importance of maintaining a distinction between ‘front of stage’ and ‘back stage’ aspects of the self and self presentation, and applies this to mid twentieth century situations. Norbert Elias shares many of Goffman's observations concerning the social importance of a distinction between inner and outer selves while at the same time tracing the division to a particular moment in European history wherein, to paraphrase Elias, the ‘battlefield was internalised. See:

Alexander Paul Hare, Herbert H. Blumberg, and Erving Goffman, *Dramaturgical Analysis of Social Interaction* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 1988), 142.

Norbert Elias et al., *The Civilizing Process* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 379.

20 Elizabeth Grosz, through the work of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva develops a critique of the dominant models of bodies, in particular a patriarchal ‘unleaking’ body against which the ‘leaky’ female body is seemingly defined. See: Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994), 192-198.

21 Julia Kristeva and Leon S. Roudiez *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press 1982),4.

item sold at the stand that was consistently singled out as an object of aversion, often offered itself as a self evident rationale for being disgusted: “Well, they’re eels aren’t they? Of course its disgusting.” Throughout the period of research in which this thesis is grounded, it was doubtlessly the eels, along with the jelly surrounding them, that elicited more squirms than any other. Jellied eels then, provide an obvious starting point: What classificatory systems does the jellied eel disturb?

According to Linnaean taxonomy, the European eel (*anguilla anguilla*) has both scales and fins and is biologically, and biblically speaking, a fish. Yet eels appear notably different from most fish, these fins and scales having been largely submerged by evolution beneath a thick, mucous-coated skin (hence the Mosaic prohibition). Perhaps most significantly this gives the eels the appearance, if not the texture, of a serpent:

“Urggh. They’re like snakes.”

“What are you saying?”

“Why would you eat snake?”

“Well...”

“Have you eaten snake?”

“I have actually... to cut a long story short, I thought I was being served a ‘snack’.”

“Ha. Uurgh I couldn’t.”²²

As well as being confused with the already-objectionable and symbolically ‘potent’ serpent, *anguilla anguilla* have their own ambiguities: Like some snakes, they survive both in water, and for a time, on land; making slow journeys across hard earth when necessary. What is more, unlike many fish, they are at home in both ocean brine and inland freshwaters. This brief biology lesson serves a purpose: While they are clearly defined as a species by standard modern

²² Conversation between Nicky, 24, and author.

taxonomies, in view of what Reitz and Wing recognise as “folk taxonomies,”²³ *anguilla anguilla* are simply weird; neither fish, nor snake, neither sea-fauna, nor land-dwelling creature, neither saltwater dweller, nor freshwater resident. In this way the eels, which locals affectionately refer to as the ‘London Sardine,’ are epistemologically slippery characters; a character trait that offers partial explanation for the squirms with which they are consistently met.²⁴

Of course, jellied eels are not the only item sold at Tubby Isaac’s to disrupt cherished folk categories. Molluscs present similar confusion. On the outside a mollusc’s geometrically patterned calcite shell renders it neither obviously ‘mineral’ nor ‘animal.’ Nor, given that most of their existence is on the murky ocean floor, are they often seen as mobile – a characteristic formally ascribed to the most minimal modalities of ‘life.’²⁵ However, it is less the hard inertia of shellfish on land that causes stomachs to wretch, than the brutal exposure of their wounded interior. When Woody Allen famously stated, “I will not eat oysters. I want my food dead – not sick, not wounded – dead.”²⁶ he was speaking within a long history of disgust directed at oysters, which are consumed neither totally dead, nor alive, but in their death throes.

There are also other folk scientific ‘orders’ to consider. For instance, before the body learns folk-taxonomies of biology, how to ‘sense’ the difference between fish and snakes, it undergoes an autodidactic physics lesson; learning about relationships between mass, light, heat, liquidity, and density through its own infantile multisensory empiricism. Through knowledges acquired by way of infantile groping the individual builds a particular sensibility through

23 Elizabeth Jean Reitz and Elizabeth S. Wing, *Zoarchaeology* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 33.

24 This was how one fisherman angling beside the Thames referred to London’s eels. Conversation between fisherman and author, July 2008.

25 From my own experience I can say that seeing, for example, a scallop skipping across the ocean floor radically changes the perception of it, making it appear far more vital than it would appear on land.

26 Woody Allen in Rebecca Stott, *Oyster* (London: Reaktion, 2004), 111.

which the world can be understood and predicted and action coordinated. However, if a ‘thing’ appears to an individual as too soft given its apparently steadfast form, too rough to touch for the smoothness perceived by the eye, too dry given its sheen, or too light given its mass, it offends this sensibility. The example of food loathing that Kristeva offers in her work might be understood as arising from the disturbance of these physical categories: For Kristeva, it is the skin on a cup of warm milk “harmless [and] thin as a sheet of cigarette paper” that, more than anything else induces “spasms in the stomach.” While Deborah Lupton proposes a culturally specific reading of this aversion – the liminality of milk (both food and drink) in French culture – it is also worth considering the material qualities sensed by fingers, lips and eyes.²⁷ The skin on the milk although a solid, undulates like a liquid and seems to slip in and out of material states. To make matters worse, it is also tacky, and sticks to the drinker’s lips, or teeth, spoiling the aforementioned cherished distinction between an autonomous self and the world.

Consider now the quivering jelly in which a jellied eel sits. Stick to the jelly (otherwise it will stick to you). This jelly, little more than cooled and congealed eel stock, excites disgust like no other substance at the stand. Like the skin on Kristeva’s warm milk, the jelly around the eel is clearly neither liquid nor solid, neither strictly speaking static nor mobile. Jelly, by definition is a substance suspended precariously between categories learnt by infantile fingers and remembered through adult eyes. As such it excites a synaesthetic dissonance that apparently easily spills over into aversion.

27 Deborah Lupton *Food, the Body and the Self* (London: SAGE, 1996), 113.

Of course synaesthetic dissonance need not necessarily result in such squirms. Consider the squeals of excitement that accompany the serving of quivering luminous jellies at a children's birthday party. In such circumstances the corporeal excitement elicited by the jelly's liminal form is converted into a source of pleasure, telling us also something of the relationship between the desire and pleasure, squirms and squeals, that arises from a transgressive experience. For reasons that I hope to elaborate on further below, jellied eels rarely elicit the same squealing intrigue and delight that jelly does. It is not just jellied eels that seem to excite this non-discursive, multisensory ambivalence that spills over into both disgust and excitement. The oyster, as Sean French describes it, is characterised by "slime," and "flesh so soft that it scarcely holds itself together."²⁸ This description, which also loosely fits mussels, cockles and other briny shellfish, can be attributed to a multitude of squirms.

However attributing the squirms to the epistemological liminality of eels, cockles and herring, might also be a slight, if you will allow the pun, red herring: When experiencing any food, we are not simply responding to our understanding of a physical material but also to our understanding of the body that is consuming it, and of the culture in which it lives. In every place and at every time, olfactory and gustatory taste have provided matrices through which to categorise and identify ourselves in relation to others, and others in relation to us. Smells and tastes relating to the object consumed do not then, simply have meaning in and of themselves. Rather they have social meanings, shaped by, and shaping, folk taxonomies of social relations. It is for such reasons that the making of sense through the taste-buds and palate has very real consequences; not least for those items and people whose tastes are out of place in a particular classificatory system, and experienced as dirty. We get a sense of both the social and subjective knowledges fortified by the experience of dirt, and the objective reality of 'dirt' by considering

²⁸ Sean French, *The Dreamer of Dreams* (London: Granta Books in association with Penguin Books, 1995), 195.

the social boundaries disturbed and ‘shored up’ through the consumption of and proximity to this particular type of seafood.

Classy Tastes

In the following section I want to run with the idea that a squirm emerges, not from a hard-wired biological response, but from the sensed disturbance to a culturally inherited category system or order. And I want to hold on to the idea that the squirm represents the shoring up of that internal sense of order, and an attempt to communicate it to others. Here, however, I want here to move away from a consideration of the way in which Tubby’s menu itself is classified (fish, mollusc, solid, liquid), into a consideration of the way the assemblage of the stand’s patrons and the flavours and aromas of their environs are understood: the multisensory (re)production of various forms of spatialised social distinctions. Moving on to considerations of how the stand and its sensoria are experienced and classified in terms of gendered and spatialised forms of social distinction, I want to start with a consideration of the interpretation of Tubby Isaac’s sensoria through gustatory taxonomies of socio-economic class.

In a 1960s survey of the highly differentiated everyday life of 1000 French people, Pierre Bourdieu famously identified clear distinctions within the habits of his study participants, in particular within their habituated gustatory ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’. Whilst these distinctions correlate with the gender and age of his participants, Bourdieu identifies the most powerful correlation being that between taste, and socio-economic class. Importantly, for Bourdieu, differences in taste or aesthetic preference are far from incidental textures of socio-economic processes.²⁹ Rather a regime of taste and distaste regulating the flavours, textures

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (Harvard University Press, 1984).

and aromas that an individual incorporates into her life cement her into a socio-economic hierarchy, signalling her similarity with others in her class, and providing a means by which to identify others relation to her.

While the meats, wines, cheeses and dining habits that Bourdieu details are very much those of a peculiar French society divided by taste, a regime of taste and distaste regulating the identification and separation of class cultures has also been identified in British contexts.

Consider the following interview excerpt from Charles and Kerr's seminal, *Women Food and Families*.

“I have a thing about chips. I can't rationalise it. I always feel that chips are associated with the lower classes. I got this thing about – I hate the smell of chips... I've always thought - do I dare say it? – it smells like a council house when you come in and it stinks of chips... you know, like I say, cheap and nasty”³⁰

As Deborah Lupton summarises, “distinctions of taste are frequently employed as ways of denigrating other social classes,” of noting how, despite the discomforting appearance of their universal humanity, ‘they’ are different.³¹ This is not, however, as suggested above, necessarily a form of denigration that is easily rationalised or explained. Rather it is a way of categorising the others that is felt in the pit of the stomach as an incontrovertible ‘gut feeling,’ justifying the sense of distinction held by the ‘refined’ body.

I have to admit here, that not one person during the time of my field work explicitly related their aversion to Tubby Isaac's to matters of socio-economic class. That is not to say that their

30 Nickie Charles and Marion Kerr, *Women, Food, and Families* (Manchester: Manchester University Press ND, 1988), 192.

31 Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body, and the Self* (London: SAGE, 1996), 97.

expressions of taste and disgust were not implicit expressions of their perceptions of their, and others social position and value. Given the strength of the statistical correlation between gustatory taste and class that Bourdieu identifies, it seems highly plausible that the squirms directed at the fare sold at Tubby Isaac's are related to the quiet articulation of class boundaries. Certainly a (dis)taste for seafood in east London has, historically, had a great deal to do with social class.

The history of a local taste for seafood in London is as long as the social history of London itself, which is, after all, a port city and opens on to the sea. It was, it seems, Romans occupiers who first brought a taste for seafood to the city they named Londinium.³² Even at this early point, a taste for seafood was active in articulating social distinction, between the oyster-guzzling Mediterranean occupiers, and the locals for whom the fruits of the river Thames and its estuary were sacred. The role of piscine flesh in marking more explicitly socio-economic forms of distinction, however, becomes clearer much later, in the sixteenth century AD.

In Elizabethan London, seafood was the core fuel source of an expanding empire, in an economic, calorific and technological sense.³³ As well as providing fuel for an emerging industrial work force, the fishing industry was intertwined, in an economic and technological sense, with the development of an imperial navy and an emergent colonial trade in commodities and humanity. As boats dispersed out of the Thames and further into the Atlantic and North Seas, there was also growth in a wealthy, non-aristocratic bourgeoisie: a proto-upper-middle-class, charged with managing and manipulating the machinery of

³² Alison Locker, "In pibiscus diversi; The Bone Evidence for Fish Consumption in Roman Britain," *Britannia* XXXVIII (2007), 141.

³³ Dyson, John, *Business in Great Waters: The Story of British Fishermen*, London: Angus and Robertson Publishers, 1977), 43.

forthcoming modernity and industrialisation.³⁴ Accordingly, there were incentives for the residual aristocratic elite to find ways in which to distinguish themselves from the new business classes. Simultaneously there was an incentive for the new business class to develop means to distinguish themselves against labouring classes. One of the ways in which this drive to distinction was met was through the development of class specific sensoria and sensibilities, differences in habitat, and in ways of interpreting the world. As Stephen Mennel has detailed, the production of cultural distinctions was particularly evident in the gustatory life of early modern Britain.³⁵

While the differences between class repertoires were partially symbolic, and partly contingent on the differences between the country and town,³⁶ they also had an economic basis, with higher social class tastes correlated with higher exchange values, which in turn are often driven by scarcity value. As Europe trotted out of its sixteenth century, for instance, as Pierro Camporesi writes, fresh, light white meats were especially popular among its newly ‘enlightened’ ruling elites. The fresh “gelatinous pulp” of oysters, for example, as Camporesi records, were savoured for their contrast to the dark, bloody wholegrain cuisine of peasants.³⁷

However, scarcity is by no means a fixed attribute, and accordingly, neither is class loyalty to a particular flavour. Over the next two hundred years, as scarcity values fluctuated, the regime of distaste upholding socio-sensory boundaries of social class shifted. We can see this clearly through a historical biography of a taste for oysters, as well as for most other items sold today

34 Norbert Elias et al., *The Civilizing Process* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 42.

35 Stephen Mennel, *All Manners of Food* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 127-133

36 *Ibid.*, 127.

37 Piero Camporesi, *Exotic Brew - The Art of Living in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Polity, 1998), 36.

Piero Camporesi, *Bread of Dreams - Food and Fantasy in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1989), 35 and 164.

at Tubby Isaac's: As economies grew, so too did the hulls of the fishing 'smacks' allowing space for ice, saltwater tanks and storage of larger nets.³⁸ This in turn facilitated direct access to all fish in the shallows, and limited access to the flavours of deepwater catches. As John Dyson writes in his rich history of British fishermen, as a result of these developments, by the eighteenth century, "whole cod's head... [and] prime fish with the fresh tang of the ocean deeps in its flesh was rare and prohibitively expensive",³⁹ whilst the taste for the shallows was becoming increasingly woven into labouring lives.⁴⁰

In this way, as well as providing calories for the sustenance of an industrial workforce, fishy flavours and a (dis)taste for them were also key components in the cultural machinery of industrialising London, with particular maritime flavours and aromas marking the boundaries of class. Visceral offence at the sensoria of the strata below was a particularly potent way of shoring up one's own sense of distinction and identity, of maintaining the place of others.

Socio-economically constituted regimes of taste and distaste found their optimal viability with the full-on emergence of the nineteenth century's industrial capitalism and the class society upon which it rested. Contrary to the etymology of *disgust*, however, it seems it was rarely encounters with the literal 'flavour' of shallow-water fish that offended sensibilities and shored up social order. Rather, it was aroma, and piscine aroma in particular. Henry Mayhew makes the olfactory disgust more explicit:

"The rooms of the very neediest of our needy metropolitan population always smell of fish... So much so, indeed that those who, like myself, have been in the habit of visiting their dwellings, the

38 John Dyson, *Business in Great Waters* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1977), 66.

39 Ibid., 67.

40 Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: G. Woodfall, 1851), 285.

smell of herrings, even in comfortable homes, savours from association, so strongly of squalor and wretchedness, as to be most often oppressive...”⁴¹

‘Needy’ is perhaps the most telling word here. Substitute needy for its contemporary synonym ‘clingy’ and you have a clearer sense of the anxiety elicited by the fishy smells of ‘the poor,’ when they permeated and clung to the life worlds of the ruling classes. At the same time as disturbing bourgeois sensibilities, responses to the fresh piscine aroma of the poor also served to shore up socio-economic forms of distinction: To paraphrase Kristeva; the abject was the ‘primer of class culture.’

According to Bourdieu’s thesis, social distinctions are reproduced by way of the inherited sensibilities through which various smells and flavours are interpreted. In a similar vein, the squirms directed at Tubby Isaac’s eels and cockles today might be understood as the endurance of a regime of taste and distaste that regulated the socio-economic stratification of early twentieth century London. More precisely, the squirms could be interpreted as result of breaches in *inherited* middle and upper-class senses of propriety.

Certainly those who squirmed at the thought of the stand were frequently employed in professional, managerial or specialised technical positions and were either local gentrifiers or intra city tourists popping over to east London for an afternoon. However while often reliable squirmers, it was certainly not only these groups that squirmed at the thought or encounter with Tubby Isaac’s seafood stand. Rather, individuals employed in semi-skilled and manual labour, both locals and out of town visitors, squirmed upon their encounter with the seafood

41 Ibid., 63.

stand, or at least with certain items it sold.⁴² In this respect, the idea that squirms directed at the seafood stand still emerge out of class-specific sensibilities, and reify the sensory foundations of socio-economic class is unreliable.

The contemporary strength of the correlation between advantage, class and taste is undermined further when considering the socio-economic status of not just those squeamish at the stand, but of those who frequent it. While the majority of the stand's customers undeniably work within traditionally 'working class' sectors, many are, in strict structuralist terms, bourgeoisie. That is to say, they are artisans and owners of the means of production: a contemporary class of 'affluent blue-collar workers,' unique to contemporary European conurbations, often living slightly outside the inner-city poverty inhabited by their parents. The stand's regular patrons include the owner of a large plumbing company, a very wealthy building contractor and the owner of race horses (one of which is named Tubby Isaac). Equally commonly, the customers are 'market traders,' not rag traders from Petticoat Lane Market but rather commodity and stock traders from the Global Market itself, erstwhile barrow boys arriving once a week from the neighbouring CBD in whose shadow the seafood stand sits.⁴³ Other regulars at the stand remarked that they were as likely to go to Selfridges for sushi and to collect expensive wines, as any of those that I spoke to who conspicuously avoided the stand. As the stall's proprietor remarked after a visit from the aforementioned wine collectors one Sunday morning, "You'd never know they were pikeys would ya? You just can't

42 While consistent, and unsqueamish consumers of the clean uniformity of surimi crab sticks or reformed fish shapes, younger working-class female visitors to the stand expressed a notable uneasiness around jellied eels, cockles, oysters, herring and whelks.

43 Several regular customers at the stand frequently pay for large amounts of seafood – for friends and family – with twenty or fifty pound notes pulled out of conspicuously large wads of what appear to be over five hundred pounds of cash. The same customers also leave substantial tips.

assume anything mate.”⁴⁴ Although I would caution against couching the observation in the same derogatory manner, he is, in a certain respect, right. When it comes to identifying socio-economic class in contemporary Britain through taste, assumptions must be put, at least partially, aside.

This is not to say, of course, that London is classless, nor that taste and distaste for Tubby Isaac’s is unrelated to a history of class. Nor are any of these developments necessarily to imply that class cultures remain related to the reproduction of social strata and a hierarchy of advantage. It is to say, however, in concurrence with recent reassessments of class culture in contemporary Britain, that the relationships between class culture and capital are far more complex, unstable and somewhat more unpredictable than they have ever been – with large amounts of internal variation and contradiction within, as well as overlap between the sensibilities of socio-economic class groups.⁴⁵ In the past, a bourgeois encounter with the habitus such as that which envelops Tubby Isaac’s might have reliably resulted in a disturbance to a cherished sense of order, breached a simultaneously corporeal and cultural boundary in such a way as to elicit a squirm. Today however, considering the socio-economic life of those that feel squeamish around Tubby Isaac’s, socio-economic status seems to have a somewhat looser grip on sensibilities relating to these sensoria than it once did. Which is not to say that the class cultures previously isomorphic with financial capital are not involved in the production of taste and distaste.

44 Pikey is a particularly complex term in British vernacular. Often, it is used, predominantly in white working class communities of the South East, to connote a member of a Romany traveling community, which is what I think was being implied in this instance. At other times, however, in rural Britain in particular it is used to designate a working class resident of ‘town’, and is partially interchangeable with other denigrating terms, including “Townie, Charver, Chavette... Scally, Skanger,” etc. See:

Imogen Tyler, “Chav Mum Chav Scum,” *Feminist Media Studies* 8, no. 1 (3, 2008): 17-34. and

Chris Haylett, “Illegitimate subjects?: Abject Whites, Neoliberal Modernisation, and Middle-Class Multiculturalism,” *Environment and Planning D*, 19, no. 3 (2001): 351–370.

45 Tony Bennett et. al, *Culture, Class, Distinction* (Taylor & Francis, 2009), 59, 124-125.

The messy distribution of class taste and distaste that appears when inspecting the squirms directed at Tubby Isaac's is partly explicable because of the shifting class formations precipitated by the factors alluded to above, and to which I will return in following chapters. But it is also, as recent augmentations⁴⁶ of Bourdieu's theory have argued, because class categories are not the only type social taxonomy and hierarchy sensed, contravened and reproduced through the sensory interpretation of urban space. Equally important categories, articulated through interpretations of the multisensory life of the city, are those pertaining to the classification of race and gender, both of which are "important structuring force[s] in the organisation of... taste... in ways that are irreducible to class."⁴⁷ At times these structuring influences map on to class strata, but at other times, gender and race cut right across them, uniting the experience of individuals across separate socio-economic strata. I will go on to explore the relationship between multisensory experience, squirms and the fortification of racialised social categories, in the following chapter. First however, I want to consider the relationship between the squirms directed at Tubby Isaac's, and the reproduction of sexualised forms of social distinction through culturally contingent sensory experiences.

Seafood, Sex and Gendered Space

There is little denying the long established link between gender, sexuality and certain seafoods. It should not, then, be possible to ask any sociological question about a (dis)taste for seafood without at least considering its relationship to sex and gender.

46 Leslie McCall, "Does gender fit? Bourdieu, feminism, and conceptions of social order," *Theory and Society* 21, no. 6 (December 1, 1992): 837-867.

47 Tony Bennett et. al, *Culture, Class, Distinction* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 232.

According to a straightforward bio-medical explanation, the transcultural association between sex, gender and seafood relates to the manner in which the nutrients in oysters and other seafoods, are ‘sensed’ by the body’s internal organs, and heighten the body’s sexual sensitivity.⁴⁸ However, equally important to consider, alongside the physiological sensitivity of reproductive organs to seafood, are the more obvious ways in which the standard ‘pre-digestive’ senses perceive symbols of sex and gender in certain seafoods. Take for instance, the turgid, slippery eel. If you would rather not, consider the oyster, referred to by one interviewee as East End Viagra. More specifically, consider the opening of the oyster shell, the rosy tint of the shell’s inner wall and its slippery, lightly salty and fleshy interior. As Rebecca Stott writes, “[t]hink of oysters, think of sex.”⁴⁹ It is precisely this, the sexual connotations of seafood, and in particular, the suggestion that its female consumers might be marked as bearers of a sexualised femininity, breaching their own ‘respectable’ sense of self, by association with sexual symbols, that I want to consider here.⁵⁰

During the course of my field work there were, in fact, several instances of a squeamishness seemingly related to the transgression of the ‘proper’ boundaries of sexuality, and therefore the norms of respectable sexuality, via an encounter with the seafood stand. The first, and perhaps the most explicit (in all meanings of the word) occurred when a middle aged ex-east Londoner, who worked in the neighbouring City, brought a younger female companion – a

48 There may well be some truth in this ‘medical materialist’ explanation. Zinc, like other minerals is especially high in seafood and comprises part of a balanced, nutritional diet. Nutrition is inextricably linked to a body’s ‘vitality.’ For zinc levels in oysters see:

George M. Pigott, Barbee W. Tucker *Seafood, Effects of Technology on Nutrition* (New York: Marcel Dekker 1991), 51.

49 Rebecca Stott, *Oyster* (London: Reaktion Books 2007), 155.

50 Beverley Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture* (London, New York, Routledge, 2004), 34.

working visitor from Kansas – to east London for a tour of its infamously sexual and exotic streets... and a quick snack:⁵¹

As he walks toward the stand, his hand guiding the small of her back, the male half of the couple comes into audibility. “C’mon, lets have some oysters.”

“Really?”

As they approach the stand I step aside from my conversation with Paul, the stall’s vendor. The man looks up towards Paul.

“I’ll have six oysters please mate.”

“To eat here?” Paul asks.

“Yeah, to eat here,” the man replies.

As the oysters are being prised open, and their flesh scraped from their casing before being dropped back into it, the man turns to his companion, hands now in his pockets, and says, “You know, they’re the reason that the Romans came to Britain these oysters..?” She raises her eyebrows, inhales and gives a thin smile; a mix of disbelief and apprehension.

Having finished the preparation, the vendor exchanges a porcelain bowl containing six oysters for a five-pound note.

The man places them on the steel counter at his waist and douses them with lemon juice and a splash of Tabasco sauce from the containers on the nearby steel shelf. He lifts the bowl up beneath his companion’s nose.

The corners of his companion’s mouth sink, while her eyebrows raise further.

“I can’t,” she says, shaking her head. “They’re horrible. Can’t you have them?”

“I will I will... don’t you worry.” He lifts a shell up to his lip, wafts it under his nose and inhales deeply. Then, in a demonstration of his expectations, keeping his eyes fixed on her and his jaw still, he flips his head back. Angling the shell slightly, the oyster slides into a cavernous gullet. Barely

51 Given that her ‘tour guide’ seemed to be both well versed in the area’s history, as well as keen to share it with his companion it is quite likely that he also informed her that the very street down which they were walking was a key site in the narrative pertaining to Jack the Ripper, who exploited residents of the areas for his own violent ends. For more on the relationship between the Ripper Murders and the popular narrativisation of the area as a site of transgression and sexual danger see Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight - Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (London: Viagro Press, 1992), 191-228.

swallowing, he brings his head back down to his lower jaw and licks his lips. “Have one. Go on.

They’re good for ya! You’ll enjoy it!”

He turns, smiling and winking at the stall’s vendor and myself.

“Really..? O...ok... let me...” she says, reaching for a shell from the bowl.

“No, no. It’s ok, I’ll do it.” She retracts her hand and he lifts an oyster in its shell towards his companion’s mouth. She jolts her neck backwards away from it. He turns his head again, winking at the stall’s vendor and myself.

With no further retraction of the neck possible, and with his hand on her waist holding her still, she coughs a little, takes a deep breath and moves her hand towards her nose which she squeezes between forefinger and thumb. Then she scrunches up her face, opens up her mouth and allows the oyster to slide in. She swallows dramatically, double checking with another swallow before exhaling and gasping, “God! That was *not* good!”

He reaches into the bowl and lifts another towards her. She turns from him, to the vendor, to me. I roll my eyes.

“Yeah, you roll your eyes,” she says turning from me back to her companion. “No. No more.

Thanks.”

His’ eyebrows raise as she sticks her tongue out – “Blaargh.”

He finishes the remaining four oysters and a conversation ensues between all of those present at the stand...

From the outset of this encounter, it seemed that the young woman was aware of the role of the oysters as a prop in her guided tour of a the mythic sexually and socio-economically transgressive spaces of London’s East End. It was certainly plain to all others present that the oysters, winks, nods and smiles were an attempt to framed the consumption as sexualised performance. It is not hard then, to think about this squirm, which was no doubt felt deep in this woman’s gut, as being less related to the ‘raw’ taste or texture of oysters themselves, than related to the symbolic nets in which the oysters, and their consumption, were enmeshed: the squirm the result of an an imperative not to be marked ‘front of stage’⁵² by a transgressive

52 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (New York. Peter Smith Publishing Inc. 1999).

femininity that might alter either her audiences' perception of her, or further still, her self-perception.

However, as symbolically connected to sex and gender as the oyster itself is, in the ethnographic encounter above, it was not simply the sexual symbolism of the oyster that elicited the squirm. Rather, as I have hinted already, it was the consumption of it in a particular space. In this instance, it was in a space which the consumer had just been told was once notorious for its trans-class, heterosocial, and heterosexual, encounters between a particular type of man and woman. Certainly, the oyster, with its sexualised symbolism, does a great deal to inform a squirm directed at it. However it is the consumption of the sexualised symbol in public space, and a public space notorious for its public, sexualised heterosociality, that secures her squeamish response.

Over the course of the ethnography there were a handful of other encounters that have suggested, quite strongly, that it is not the consumption of the food itself, but the spatial context of its consumption, that most reliably prefigures squirms. Or rather, the social meaning that is projected on to the constellation of smells, textures, sounds and sights that surround the seafood stand. This was especially obvious when those who squirmed at Tubby Isaac's suggested that elsewhere, for instance in the 'private' comfort of home, or "a proper seafood restaurant", would happily consume the same food. Recall, this was inferred in the invitation that awkwardly closed the ethnographic encounter at the start of this chapter, where the speaker differentiated between the 'dirty,' public, context of the seafood stand, and the private intimacy of a "*proper* seafood restaurant."⁵³

53 In this instance, it turns out that the interviewee had in mind a small oyster bar run by her friends in a notoriously gentrified food hall in south London.

There is then, a clear spatial variation in the manner in which an individual's (dis)tastes are expressed, coupling the production of gender and class distinction to particular spaces; and eventuating in the spatialisation of social distinction.⁵⁴ Drawing on these observations, what I want to consider below is that it is not necessarily the gendered or class-based symbolism of Tubby's seafood itself that renders it abject. But rather its existence within a spatial assemblage – a constellation of smells, sounds, textures, flavours and even temperatures – that are perceived through classificatory systems pertaining to class and sexual propriety, to be transgressive.

The Space that Difference Makes

Certainly there is a historical precedent for the articulation of a sense of social distinction in relation to the geography of Tubby Isaac's environs. From the moment that the Romans established the settlement of Londinium, spatialised social distinctions have existed within the city, and these were perceived and maintained through the distributions of certain sensoria within the city, which marked one class, and one class space, as separate from the other.⁵⁵ Sitting in the prevailing winds of from the west, and home to an olfactory cocktail of tanneries, cemeteries, and drainage ditches, the east was, accordingly, home to the powerless.⁵⁶

By the early 1900s, when Tubby Isaac's first opened, on a location only metres away from the eastern extremity of the old Roman wall, an atop several medieval plague burial pits and

54 Simon Duncan, "Uneven Development and the Difference that Space Makes," *Geoforum* 20, no. 2 (1989): 131–139.

55 Like ancient Greeks, Romans frequently zoned their cities and settlements according to the system of rule pertaining to wind direction, sunlight and topography that would aid in the articulation of power through the populace. See: Christopher G. Boone and Ali Modarres, *City and Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 13.

56 For Kristeva, the sensory encounter with a corpse is one of the most universal sources of abjection. What seems everywhere as a socially unmediated discomfort with dead body, results primarily from the disturbance of the binary of subject and object, and in doing so, provides an uncomfortable reminder of both our mortality and materiality Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

behind tanneries, workshops and a fish market, the ‘dirty’ work, and the dirty people that undertook it, were confined to the east of the city.⁵⁷ Moreover the asymmetrical spatial distribution of ‘dirty’ living endured symbiotically with the sensibilities with which the west denigrated the sensoria of the east, and maintained, through visceral olfactory and gustatory disgust, a sense of distinction.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, when Tubby Isaac’s first opened and when the East End of London became a sociological subject itself, it also became plain that these senses of social distinction encoded within the sensory landscape of the city were not simply distinctions of class. As Judith Walkowitz demonstrates powerfully in her analysis of turn-of-the-century tabloid articles about east London, the sensibilities through which the city’s sensory topography were interpreted, also (re)produced gendered forms of distinction within class difference:⁵⁸ In contrast to the private space inhabited by private, ‘chaste’ and homebound women of the city’s west, the women of the city’s east inhabited public space alongside men, a form of habitation that included casual sexual contact with men from the city’s west. The open-air sensoria of the city’s east, were then, sensed by wealthier women in the west as a threat not only to the sense of class distinction that they held, but also to a sense of gendered distinction, derived from their difference from the public life of men *and* women in the city’s east. Accordingly the squirms excited by the miasma of the city’s east shored up a hegemonic, gendered sense of propriety that enfolded with a sense of class distinction. Together they produced a ‘sense’ of a sexually and culturally dangerous space that resulted in the spatialisation of real social distinctions.

57 Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (New Providence: Barnes & Noble Publishing, 2004), 59, 187.

58 Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Certainly the pronounced ‘sense’ of the classed and gendered space that once regulated London’s social topography would have been a viable explanation for the squirms directed at Tubby Isaac’s in the city of the early twentieth century. However, as mentioned already, in many respects the ‘hardware’ that sustained distinctions in both sensoria and sensibility between east and west London has long since gone: The old docks, for instance, have been relocated further east toward the mouth of the Thames. So too has the quay and old fish market. Much of the smelly and noisy heavy industry that once characterised the area – weaving, tanning, spinning and printing – has long since been outsourced to global industrial zones in the south, and replaced with retail and wholesale fabric and garment traders. The effluent that used to be carried on breezes and rivers from the west has been channelled into sewers and underground rivers. All in all, the East End is considerably less sensorially distinguishable from the wealth and west of London, than it once was. Yet despite an absence of this material scaffolding over which socio-symbolic meanings were for centuries draped, spatialised forms of social distinction clearly endure, and the consumption of an oyster within the geographical context of an East End street still determines whether the consumption of the oyster is experienced as a class or sexual transgression.

Given the absence of this spatial hardware that once sustained spatialised social distinction, and the aforementioned interruptions to the intergenerational transmission of habitus, ‘senses’ of spatial distinctions must be maintained and reproduced through other mechanisms. We get a better sense of one of the mechanisms through which spatialised sensibilities endure by returning to the squeamish midwesterner: In her case, the anxious sensitivity to the oysters she was being force-fed, was shaped in similar ways to the squeamishness of those exposed to the nineteenth-century tabloid accounts of the East End detailed by Walkowitz; her squirm is the result of the narrated cartography she was being given as a lens to interpret her surroundings.

As ghost stories heighten aural sensitivities to creaking floor boards and cold breezes, narratives about the licentious East End relegate the everyday sensory ambience to the background, and foreground sensory signifiers of dangers; signposts for the tourist to orientate themselves to the type of space in which they find themselves. In this case we see how senses of spatialised distinction within London, be they gender or class-based, result less, in the first instance, from the raw sensoria of the spaces themselves, than from a sensitivity to ‘distinguishing’ features, aroused through spatial narratives about east London.

The Real Danger of Dirt

Considered as a ‘way of sensing’ shaped through narratives, language and cultural categories, few of the squirms dissected above result from any immediate or ‘real’ threat to the body’s physical consistency by a pathogen or poison. With the poisonous vapours and dangerous social types safely sublimated by the modern city’s organisation, in most instances the squirms arise from a mere “linguistic” or symbolic “leakiness” a contravention of categories imprinted on the senses by matrices of culture, language and knowledge.⁵⁹ The space around Tubby Isaac’s, the smell of piscine flesh, the texture of a jellied eel, the xenophobic banter shared between its patrons, the licentious sexualities iterated through the public consumption of an oyster, all of which might induce a squirm, are only ‘symbolically dirty’ according to the cultural sensibilities through which multisensory data is rendered. Accordingly the squirms rendered above could simply be considered as responses to symbolic and subjective dangers; the threat to the squirmer’s own, and other’s perceptions of her social self. They are not, it must be restated, related to the objective detection of biological pathogens. That is not to say, however, that they have no consequences within the realm of objects.

⁵⁹ Carol Walkowitz, ‘Linguistic Leakiness or Really Dirty’ in Ben Campkin and Rosie Cox, *Dirt* (I.B. Tauris, 2008), 15-25.

Following a caution delivered by critical realist Carol Walkowitz in her appraisal of Kristevan and Douglasian theories of dirt, there is a risk in a focus on the narrative or symbolic production of the squirms, that sociological analysis remains numb to the *real* social consequences of symbolic dirt. Moreover, it also threatens to make us blind to ‘*real* dirt’ and genuine threats posed by toxins, pathogens and poisons to life. While we have every reason to argue with explanation that assumes the symbolically dirty to be objectively dirty, we should also caution against an anthropological tendency to forget both that real dirt exists, and that squirms, as germane to subjective composition as they might be, have ‘real’ causes and consequences. As I will discuss below both; the natural sciences disregard of symbolic dirt and an anthropological numbness to real dirt – as well as a concomitant disregard for the *real* consequences of symbolic dirt are related. Both arise from an inability to distinguish real dirt from symbolic dirt.

Not least of these consequences that arise from the squeamish encounter with a symbolically dirty smell, or flavour, is the one that arises from the fact that society at large generally assumes the symbolically dirty, to be really dirty. As a result of this confusion there is a tendency to relegate both the symbolically, and the really dirty, to the same spaces. As a result the same spaces of the city that threaten social consistency and dignity, harbour disproportionate threats to the mortality of their inhabitants. Consider, for example, the portrait at the opening of this chapter: a photograph of one of Tubby Isaac’s most regular types of customers, one of a multi-racial team of local street cleaners. Like other manual workers in the area, many of this team of “unfortunate, refuse collector-cum-exterior designers,” visit the stand during or after their shift of pacing, scraping and sweeping.⁶⁰ In the case of the mixed teams of Polish, Romany, British and West African manual labourers,

60 Sukhdev Sandhu, *Night Haunts* (London: Artangel, 2007).

hanging around ‘dirty’ space, eating ‘dirty’ food, telling ‘dirty’ stories, it’s essential not to lose sight of the fact that the ‘symbolic dirtiness’ of their situation, arrests them to the *really* dirty work; work that threatens the boundary between life and death.⁶¹ The arresting of the symbolically dirty to real dirt can also be seen in the life of the sex workers whose shifts overlap with those of the street cleaners, and whose performances become the pivot of their stories. Or consider also the very real dangers faced by the Chinese DVD sellers, mentioned in the passage with which this chapter opened. Four months after the cabbie had joked about the local DVD sellers being removed from the streets, Xiao Mei Guo, a local pirated DVD vendor was one of two women (the other was a local sex worker: a familiar face in the neighbourhood) abducted all but 100 meters from the hub this ethnography, raped and murdered by Derek Brown; a man that the ruling QC remarked, “preyed on the edges of society” – a spatially and socially accurate summation. And of course, labouring both geographically and culturally, at the ‘edge of British society’, are the other migrant labourers denigrated in the xenophobic cabbie’s banter: Morecambe Bay’s Chinese cockle pickers. In this instance the work was so literally dirty that at least 23 lives were lost to the dawn tides of February, 2004.

Identified through the sounds, smells and sights that surround them, as well as the spaces they inhabit, as symbolically dirty, all of the above are also chained to *real* dirt. In this sense, the squirms that this chapter has focused upon mark real dangers. However, contrary to the dominant understandings of disgust, this danger is far less pressing for those identifying the dirty smells, sights, sounds and flavours, than those whose habituses are being reviled, joked about or ogled.

61 It is not, it seems, from the author’s fieldwork, uncommon for a street cleaner to pick up needles or shards of glass that puncture, first their glove, and then their skin. Nor is it uncommon to be assaulted by the person whose vomit they will later clean up. Builders visiting the stand also tell stories of the injuries sustained in their careers in one of the country’s most dangerous professions.

Conclusion

As I hope to have demonstrated over the course of this chapter, the scrunching up of the face, the curling upper lip or pouting lower lip and the unease in the gut that is often elicited by the jellied eels, cockles and oysters sold at Tubby Isaac's, often has very little to do with any 'real' biological threat posed by the seafood stand, or the identification of 'real' dirt. Rather, it marks the moment that the body reinforces the sensibility through which they make sense of, and orientate themselves towards, the world. The squirm, however, encompasses a great deal more than simply the reinforcement of abstract linguistic categories and cultural taxonomies. Rather, it is enmeshed in the making, and remaking, of social categories; forms of distinction that have a very 'real' impact on everyday life. In this way, the encounters with the seafood stand that I have detailed throughout this chapter are exemplary reciprocal relationships between gut feelings, visceral sensory experiences and social formation. Through an attention honed on the response to the peculiar sensoria of the seafood stand, it is possible to see both class distinctions, and gendered forms of distinction existing in a mutually reinforcing relationship with the ways in which bodies make sense of urban environments. Moreover, while I do not have the space to explicate it here, the same might be said for a sense of generational and ethnic distinction, all of which were unwittingly articulated through the corporeal interpretation of the piscine sensoria of the seafood stand and its environs.

However, while for heuristic purposes, I have tried to separate out a consideration of gender and class and their relationship with the senses, in reality the squirms directed at Tubby Isaac's emerge out of a mutually reinforcing tangle of class, gender, generational forms of distinction.

Such is the intensity with which this tangle of social distinctions are produced and reproduced through the sensory experience of Tubby's and its environs, that squirms directed at it are in

many respects, increasingly overdetermined. This is clear not only in the responses of people to the seafood stand, but also in the fortunes of the stand itself. Having once been a thriving business – open a guaranteed seven days a week – and selling to a wide range of customers, across genders, classes and generations, the stand is now open less consistently, and serves primarily only a small group of regular patrons. Of course there are obvious material factors leading to this decline: a new road layout nearby prohibits many of the vendor’s less regular, non local customers, who arrived by car, from easily pulling up alongside the stall. Eels stocks in the near North Sea have also plummeted by 98%, forcing the price to ascend and pricing out all consumers other than those with an unshakeable craving for their light, jellied flesh.⁶² The stand’s partial decline is, however, also related to the proliferation of squirms directed at it, a proliferation grounded in the mutually reinforcing senses of social distinction governing how the stand, and its environs, are perceived, i.e. as dirty, dangerous and out of place according to a hegemonic set of sensibilities in contemporary London. That is not to say that there is no seafood sold at the street markets across east London today. Both the recently gentrified markets at Borough and Spitalfields boast uncanny perversions of the old oyster vendor, serving oysters in a French style (with a shallot vinegar), in tune with the Francophile ‘regeneration’ of much of east London. Elsewhere in the nearby markets of Whitechapel and Ridley Road, fishmongers sell a mixture of European and ‘exotic’ catches: snapper, bream, monkfish, king prawn, squid and conger eel for use in the melange of Caribbean, Bengali, Turkish, Vietnamese and West African food cooked in the areas every evening. Ridley Road market, about 40 minutes walk north east of Petticoat Lane, has at least five such fishmongers, and in addition, as a market primarily frequented by an Afro-Caribbean diaspora, sells vast quantities of salted cod, a taste for which was deposited when the shoppers’ ancestors’ were

62 “Thames eel populations fall 98%,” BBC, January 22, 2010, sec. London, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/london/8473965.stm.

enslaved and made to labour across oceans. A taste for none of these, however, synchronises easily with a taste for Tubby Isaac's fare or the space in which it is embedded.

While the fate of a 3ft by 6ft dilapidated seafood trailer might seem of little significance with regards to the wider structuring of the city, the squirms that shape its fortune are highly indicative of both the unwitting and witting mechanisation of sensibility that drives social formation in contemporary London, stratifying the global city's social formations and shaping the subjectivities of its dwellers. Retaining a focus on the squirm, I will now carry the analysis through into the next chapter's consideration of negative responses to the hyper-osmic sensoria of Ridley Road market, focusing particularly on the manner in which race is constructed and animated in reference to the multisensory experience of that market.

Dirty Stories: Space, Race and the Senses

The previous chapter focused on the manner in which gendered and class-based forms of social distinctions were articulated through the experience of the sensoria that surround Tubby Isaac's seafood stand. It argued that class and gender distinctions were actualised in and around Tubby Isaac's as a result of a combination of habituated ways of sensing that space, the material qualities of the sensoria that filled it, as well as spatial narratives that framed its concomitant flavours and textures as 'symbolically dirty'. It closed by arguing that as well as being ascribed symbolically dirty status, the space, and those that resided in it, were also more likely to be subject to 'real' dirt and danger. The following chapter retains attention on the relationship between socially stratifying work done by noses and taste-buds, in particular the experience of distaste and the identification of 'dirt' through it. However, while the previous chapter focused primarily on the manner in which the boundaries of class and gender are sensed, this chapter introduces an exploration of 'gut feelings,' and the hierarchical stratification of race – senses of moral, cultural and biological distinction, that live on through the assumptions ascribed to (multi)sensed physical differences. To elaborate this argument, the following chapter shifts the ethnographic focus a half-hour walk up the road from Petticoat Lane and Tubby Isaac's Seafood Stand towards Ridley Road Market in the London Borough of Hackney, the same market introduced to the reader at the end of the short walk in chapter two, and returned to in chapter five.

The previous chapter looked primarily at instances of squeamishness *in situ*, briefly looking at the role of spatial narratives and their relationship with the senses, to explore the ways in which the stories about the licentious East End shaped the experience of it. The following chapter spends considerably more time reflecting on the traffic between spatial narratives, the

multisensory experience of urban space and the spatialisation of social distinctions. Following Alessandro Portelli's attention to narratives, this chapter takes a selection of stories featuring the fruit and meat sold underneath and behind the striped canopies of Ridley Road market, and aims to interpret 'the interests, dreams and desires of the tellers' that lie "beneath them."¹ Beyond that, partially drawing on Brian Massumi's interpretation of Hertha Sturn's experiments with narrative and film, this chapter aims to explore the manner in which emotion-laden narratives intensify and shape the experience of a particular scene.² Or rather, given the spatial nature of these narratives, this chapter aims to explore the manner in which 'sensational' emotive stories feed back into, and intensify the sensual and emotional experience of that space, the labels that are ascribed to it, as well as the actions performed within it.

Again, like the previous chapter (and unlike the following two) this chapter draws on narratives that reflect and shape 'negative' experiences of the street market and its attendant sensoria.

Unlike the previous chapter, however, this chapter focuses more on negative orientations towards the sensoria of an entire street market, as opposed to one stall. By negative, however, I do not mean to impute a normative judgement on my part. Rather, the chapter refers to instances where the subject narrating the market simply does not affirm what it senses in osmotic clouds drifting between the stalls; instead the subject perceives it as a threat, and responds by turning its stomach, or on its heel.

This does not, as yet entail any reflection on my ethnographic engagements with the market's users and traders, which will be developed in the following two chapters. This is not to say that the market's users do not have negative experiences of it. Many of its users have a notably

1 Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, (New York: State University of New York Press 1991), 2.

2 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Duke University Press, 2002), 23-27.

ambivalent relationship with the market, and quietly express strong aversions to certain components – tamarind, snails, alfonso mangoes – and not to mention the rubbish that collects at its eastern extremity at the end of a hot day.³ However, notably negative orientations towards the market-as-a-whole are scarce within it.⁴ This is in stark contrast to the view of the market reflected by ‘outsiders’ nonetheless ‘familiar’ with it; residents living nearby, council workers, the market’s administrators and journalists. It is these ‘outsiders’ and the stories about the market that they tell, that I want to focus on here.

The Battles of Ridley Road

For the main part, the chapter focuses on spatial narratives about, and experiences of, the *contemporary* market. For a moment, however, I would like to turn ears, noses and eyes toward a Ridley Road of the mid twentieth century; in particular to the summer of 1947: During, what was at the time, one of the ‘hottest British summers on record,’⁵ both local and national newspapers were filled with uncannily familiar stories about soaring petrol prices precipitated by instability in the Middle East, popular outrage at the recent murder of British soldiers in Palestine by (Jewish) militants, and, perhaps less familiarly, uncertainty regarding the arrival of Indian and Pakistani independence.⁶ It was against the background of these events, and in particular the sentiment stirred through their representation in the press, that the leader of

3 These are just some of the items mentioned by participants on walks around the market as not being to their taste. Most frequently the aversion was attributable to a specific biographical episode.

4 When asked about the ‘cleanliness’ of the market, 50% of its users thought it could be improved whereas 90% of ‘residents’ living nearby thought the same. Again, when asked about the quality of produce, 36% of market users wanted to see improvement, whereas 55% of local ‘residents’ did.
Ridley Road Market, *Survey Results*, Hackney Council, 2009,
http://www.hackney.gov.uk/Assets/Documents/ridley_road_market_survey_results.pdf, accessed May 2010

5 Now one of the seven hottest of the last century. For more see
Webb, J.D.C, Meanden, G.T. ‘Daily temperature extremes for Britain’. *Weather*, 2000, 55, 298-315

6 *Hackney Gazette*, July-September 1947.
The Times, July-September 1947, <http://archive.timesonline.co.uk> accessed July 2007

fascist organisation “The British League of Ex-Servicemen,” saw political opportunities in the overheated bodies, flavours and aromas that coagulated daily at what he referred to as ‘Yiddley Road.’ Accordingly on one of the market’s busiest days – a Sunday in late August – he erected a platform in a clearing at the foot of the market, surrounded by kosher butchers, Italian entertainers and bagel bakeries, and orated a narrative aimed at converting the experience of the market into one of violent disgust, fear and hatred for its “alien horrors.”

“We will fight it to the death. Never will you impose your Oriental, Mongolian, Asiatic creed of Communism upon us... That is the answer of the British people... Buy British!”⁷

This speech, the violence it precipitated, and the resistance posed to it by militant antifascists snowballed into weekly bouts of what one paper referred to as “Open-Air Politics.”⁸ As much as this was open-air politics, “The Battle of Ridley Road,” as it was later coined, was politics of the open air itself: a struggle over the ways in which to perceive and interpret the smells, flavours, rhythms and textures of London’s public space.



“Open-Air Politics” *Hackney Gazette*, September 10th, 1947

7 Jeffery Hamm et al., *The Battle of Ridley Road*, London, Raven Books 1947), 8, 17, *The Battle of Ridley Road, Hackney Gazette*, Monday October 13th, page 1. *Daily Worker*, September 15th 1947.

8 “Open-Air Politics” *Hackney Gazette*, September 10th 1947, front page.

Despite his eventual arrest, and the dissolution of his party as the summer fizzled out, Hamm had partially achieved his objective; converting the affective excitement stimulated by subtle differences that individuals smelt, saw and heard between themselves, into disgust for simultaneously biological, cultural and political contagions. Two summers later, and more famously, Oswald Mosely and his Black Shirt fascists reinvigorated the sensitivity to difference stirred by Hamm. Espousing a new torrent of narratives about the alien dangers posed to London, Mosely honed in on the market and recommenced and rallies through it, as well as ordering violent incursions into its surrounding streets, severely injuring several Jewish teenagers in the process.⁹ Eventually chased out of the market, he returned to it again one more time, and even less successfully in 1962.¹⁰

Of course, Hamm's actions, Mosely's attempt to harness the taxonomies of scientific racism, and the prejudices of cultural exclusivism as a device for interpreting the commingling smell, sights, sounds and flavours of London were nothing particularly new. As Paul Gilroy has argued, "making politics aesthetic" was far from a "strategy that originated in twentieth-century fascism."¹¹ Rather it was a strategy that had for centuries, provided resources for Europeans abroad to hierarchically arrange colonial subjects according to their skin tones and bone structures.¹² As historians of the senses, Mark M. Smith and Alain Corbin separately demonstrate, it was also a strategy that altered the ways in which Europeans perceived,

9 One of these teenagers was aspiring playwright Harold Pinter. See: Graham Macklin, 'Police Failed Harold Pinter,' *BBC History Magazine*, Vol. 5, No. 9 September 2004.

10 "1962: Violence flares at Mosley rally," *BBC*, July 31, 1962, sec. 31.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/31/newsid_2776000/2776295.stm.

11 Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps* (London New York: Routledge 2004), 56.

12 Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
Yasmin Gunaratnam, *Researching Race and Ethnicity* (London: SAGE, 2003), 11.
Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), 34.
Londa L. Schiebinger, *Nature's Body* (Toronto: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

interpreted and valued the textures, aromas and flavours associated with the lives of the colonised.¹³

Perhaps what is more important, beyond simply shaping the way in which ‘white Europeans’ discursively thought about ‘others,’ the ‘ways of sensing’ peculiar to biological racism burrowed deep into bodies to colonise the non-conscious praxis through which everyday life was negotiated. Once established in the praxis of everyday life, folkish stories about the multisensory differences between ‘races’ served to reflect, resurface and intensify the association between ‘senses’ of difference and race. Hamm and Mosely’s attempts to conflate the poly-aromatic air of the overheated market with the racial and cultural inferiority of its Jewish multicultural users were exactly this: The amplification of multisensory sensitivity to difference, coupled with evaluations that equate the gut feeling it provokes, as marking the moral and biological boundaries of race.

What is remarkable is that, by the mid twentieth century, with the retreat of Empire, and in a clearing made by a fascist bomb that dropped on Ridley Road, these sensitivities to difference remained convertible to divisive ‘gut feelings’.¹⁴ So tenacious, and deeply embodied, were the sensory components of racism, that they continued to resurface right into the 1970s and late 80s, albeit mobilised more frequently by culturalist discourses than biological rhetoric: As the multicultural market place morphed to accommodate Caribbean and South Asian palates alongside the residues of eastern European, Italian and Irish influence, far-right interest in the market once again intensified. This time the intensity of this interest increased significantly following a string of ‘moral panics’ about the introduction of crack cocaine to London and

¹³ Mark Michael Smith, *How Race is Made* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2006).

Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 157, 209-210.

¹⁴ Graham Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosely and the Postwar Reconstruction of British Fascism* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2007), 42.

the alleged activities of Jamaican ‘Yardy’ gangs around the market area, panics circulated by print-media in conjunction with the local police.¹⁵ Accordingly, the tabloid stories, official statements and the increased police presence at the market heightened sensitivity to the vectors (cassava, reggae, plantain) through which simultaneously cultural and biological epidemics, were seen, heard and smelt, to be transplanted into London.

In both the forties and the eighties, Ridley Road market, which has since its genesis been central to the lives of numerous overlapping migrant, and working-class East Enders, was the obvious location to invigorate racist and nationalist politics. Whether delivered from a clearing in the market, through the pages of the red-top press or in official police statements, narratives about the market went to great efforts to frame the corporeal excitement elicited by its polyaromatic air, as gut feelings for the moral, cultural and biological boundaries of nation, ethnicity and race.

Fortunately however, and this is partly a testament to the resistance put up by the market’s users, local residents, and also as sustained antiracist political intervention, the ongoing morphogenesis of the East End has apparently outlived the ideologies of racial purity, as well as the violent politics of ethnic and national exclusivity. This is not to say that the market’s users do not sense differences between one another’s life worlds in the air of market, but these are not taken as essential markers of racial distinction, and are often playfully acknowledged through the interactions that take place therein: For the last twenty years or so, the only voices hollering from the clearing at the foot of the market where Hamm once stood, are the

15 As Michael Keith records the narratives that stirred the moral panic were also given a public official ‘stamp of approval’ by metropolitan police chief, Kenneth Newman, who gave his own account of criminal activity in the area, describing it as being “at the centre of [an] area ... where crime is at its worst, where drug dealing is intolerably overt, and where the racial ingredient is at its most present.” Michael Keith *Lore and Disorder: Race Riots and Policing in a Multi Racist Society* (Berkeley: UCL Press, 1993), 41. Kenneth Newman in Michael Keith, ‘No Go Areas’ in Cashmore, E. and McLaughlin, E. (eds.) *Out of Order?* (London, New York: Routledge, 1991), 190.

transcultural witticisms of one long-established trader: “Bunches of banana – cheaper than in Ghana!”

The conviviality of life within the contemporary ‘hyper-diverse’ market (detailed further in the next chapter), should not be taken to imply, however, that the struggles over the interpretation of the market’s complex gustatory and olfactory topography are over. As the rest of this chapter will argue, there are still many narrative accounts of the market, that both reflect and amplify an intensely negative relationship to the differences that are ‘sensed’ within it. Of course, such responses can simply be understood in terms of arbitrary, or biographically specific manifestations of distaste. However, the particular smells and tastes consistently alluded to, the general rhetorical structure of the spatial narratives, and their strong emotional component, suggest something less innocent. While supremacist rhetoric and racial science may have lost much of the grip on popular imaginations that they once had, narratives about the market suggest the endurance of the phenomenological components of racism: the gut senses of distinction that, as Iris Marion Young puts it, endure “at the level of routine habits... and in unconsciously motivated reactions and symbolic associations.”¹⁶ What has changed, as the following interpretation of narratives about Ridley Road aim to demonstrate, is the work that these phenomenological components or ‘race sensing’ are put to, and the type of distinctions they are now taken to mark.

Rotten: The Limits of a ‘Cosmopolitan’ Sensibility

The first narrative account of contemporary Ridley Road that I want to consider is that given by Carolina, a young, well-off professional female from northern Australia, and an

¹⁶ Iris Marion Young, ‘Abjection and Oppression: Dynamics of Unconscious Racism, Sexism and Homophobia’ in A.B. Dallery et al. eds.) *Crises in Continental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 204.

acquaintance of mine. At the time of the following conversation she lived in a newly built loft style apartment, an erstwhile ‘wharf’ about seven minutes walk from Ridley Road market. We meet, on this occasion, over a croissant and cup of tea in a cafe in the West of London – not, initially, for research purposes:

“...Yeah, we’ve just moved house.”

“Where to?”

“Dalston.”

“Dalston? It’s great, I like it. So you’re over east now?”

Like many young professionals who moved to the area in the early millennium Carolina was partially drawn to Dalston Junction by a ‘sense’ of its coolness, grounded in representations of its ‘colourful,’ and ‘vibrant’ culture: “Cooler” than neighbouring Shoreditch, which had, over the last decade, had its edges blunted and priced up by the encroaching financial quarter. Part of the perceived edginess of the Dalston area was grounded in representations of its ethnic composition; certain forms of ethnicity had, over recent decades, become “a come-on, an opportunity for real-estate speculators to make a killing” selling to those wishing to express their cosmopolitan credentials.¹⁷ She also considered her relocation to a ‘marginal’ area of east London, as a financial investment, betting on the promise that, in a matter of years, the currently affordable area would be a ‘transport hub’ and that property prices would soar.¹⁸ Carolina’s narrative, however, reveals the extent to which, upon arrival, much of the area was experienced not only as edgy. Rather, certain spaces remained *beyond the edge* of her ideas about cosmopolitan living, and outside of the boundaries of her sensibility. In this sense, her account of Ridley Road market is exemplary:

17 Sukdev Sandhu, “Come Hungry, Leave Edgy,” *London Review of Books* 25, no. 15 (2003): 10–13.

18 At the time of writing, the new Dalston Junction Station was on the brink of reopening with new connections to north and south east London.

“Do you know Ridley Road? I’m doing some research there.”

“Huh... I tried shopping there.” Carolina pauses. “The fruit’s rotten isn’t it?”

“Some of it, I guess. Don’t you use it then?”

“.. Lets just say its not my favourite part of the area. There’s a Sainsbury’s right by. Do you know what I mean? I get my tomatoes there.” A pause. I say nothing. “I mean, it stinks though right? My boyfriend's had some trouble round there... recently. You know, just up past...”

“Yeah yeah. I know it. What kind of trouble?”

“You know, abuse. I mean, he’s a big fella, and he’s got a shaved head so I can understand why he gets stick.”

“Oh. Stick. No good. What happened?”

“The other week, we were walking and there was this couple of guys and they started shouting shit at him or something. He’s really angry about it, he’s not racist at all. One of his best mates is black. I know everybody says that but he is. He’d never be racist... Broadway Market’s very nice. Are you doing anything there?”

“Well, it’s certainly an interesting market... but no.”

As Bonilla-Silva¹⁹ argues, the cliched caveats such as that offered by Carolina concerning her boyfriend’s-best-friend’s skin colour, are often tell-tale signs of an implicitly racist outlook, and are frequently used as a sort of “discursive buffer,” for racist remarks. In this instance, however, Carolina seemed aware of the problematic use of such excuses. Knowing Carolina relatively well, I also felt assured that, in tune with the protocols of “colour-blindness” that Bonilla-Silva evaluates, Carolina and her partner genuinely do not ‘see’ race. Or at least they do not readily ascribe moral judgments to sensed differences in skin tone or bone structure. This does not mean, however, that the habits of making sweeping moral judgements based on aesthetic differences, have been entirely excavated from the praxis that Carolina inhabits. Nor have they been excavated from the lives of others in dwelling in the area around the market.

19 Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 57.

For example, it would be impossible to go further without at least acknowledging the manner in which the ‘couple of guys’ featured in Carolina’s narrative apparently ‘see’ race: Ascribing moral meaning to the skin colour, size and haircut of her boyfriend, mistaking the physical manifestations of whiteness for a performance of violent whiteness. But these ‘guys’ are not the only ones to ascribe a moral value to a sensed aesthetic difference. That Carolina’s narrative follows the discursive protocols of “colour blindness” – not explicitly talking about the skin colour of her boyfriend’s aggressors, not judging his best friend’s blackness – does not imply that she does not ‘sense’ moral distinction between herself and ‘others’ in her new neighbourhood. Simply that, to get a sense of the distinctions that Carolina tentatively traces, we have to turn attention away from what is made visible, or invisible in Carolinas narrative, toward the other sensory details she provides and the emotion with which she describes them.

As Smith has written, discussions of race have long been “held hostage to the eye,”²⁰ based on the dominant assumption that the racism is primarily articulated through reference to a visually identifiable ‘phenotype.’²¹ Accordingly, Bonilla-Silva argues, antiracist struggles have focused primarily on promulgating the protocols of “colour blindness,”²² – ways of not seeing, or at least not talking about racially coded visual traits– such as that embodied by Carolina. For all its ‘worthiness,’ however, there are many important criticisms to level at the development of ‘colour blindness.’²³ Most important given our current concerns, is the manner in which the focus on the development of ‘ways of seeing,’ or rather ‘*not* seeing,’ race, has been at the

20 Mark M. Smith. *How Race is Made* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 3.

21 Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 31.

22 The use of the American spelling here has been retained, as the concept has largely been developed with American contexts. For more see: Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists, Color Blindness and The Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

23 In particular at the “abstract liberalism” manifest in its attempts to short-circuit attempts to redress the injustices of race with a new way of seeing. Bonilla-Silva, *Ibid.* 30-48.

expense of attention to the manner in which essential cultural distinctions are enduringly attached, and moral judgements ascribed, to the aromas and flavours sensed to inflect fellow humans' life worlds. Smell, in particular, as Martin F. Manalansan argues in his olfactory ethnography of New York City, continues to provide the most powerful and persuasive indexes of racial difference.²⁴ Foregrounding the offensive odour in narrative accounts of urban spaces remains one of the few admissible ways of hierarchically valourising the city's residents; underpinning the reproduction of spatialised forms of ethnic, and economic distinction. As Constance Classen writes, "the odour of the other... often serve[s] as a scapegoat for certain antipathies toward the other..." especially notable "when members of one culture attribute an exaggeratedly offensive odour to members of another culture for whom they feel an animosity for unrelated reasons."²⁵ Which returns us to Carolina's narrative.

Having been unfairly attributed particular qualities of 'whiteness' herself, does Carolina then not readily single out, then attribute an exaggeratedly offensive odour to what she perceives to be the spatial context in which the encounter happened? Does Carolina not sense the aesthetic and moral boundaries of her 'cosmopolitan' culture, in the ambience of Ridley Road Market? Certainly, to be fair to Carolina, Ridley Road is highly aromatic, and, especially at the end of a hot day, its definitive smell – a mix of dried fish, fruit, the sea and incense – can be extremely pungent, although not always plainly unpleasant: While many remark on its "whiff" or "pong" few of those at the market display the same emotion or ascribe the same moral meaning to the odour as Caroline does. Consider, the very (im)precise language that Carolina used. When we mention a "stink," we are often not just talking about an unpleasant smell – although a particular smell is often singled out. Rather, as Classen notes, we are often trying to

24 Martin F. Manalansan, "Immigrant Lives and the Politics of Olfaction in the Global City," in Drobnick, J. (ed.) *The Smell Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2006): 41–52.

25 Constance Classen, "The odor of the other: olfactory symbolism and cultural categories," *Ethos* 20(2) (1992): 134.

label something, somebody, or some place that “disagrees with our notion of propriety,” and elicits negative emotions.²⁶ The identification of a “stink,” is, in this sense, also the delivery of a moral judgment against the people or space from which it arises. Likewise, rotting fruit has long provided a metonym to talk about individuals or groups that pose threats to the production and maintenance of a community’s moral order, or a normative sense of propriety. Consider the uses of the terms ‘rotten,’ ‘rotter,’ or ‘bad apple’. Of course rot elsewhere recognised as fermentation, is also affirmed as an olfactory signifier of maturity or fecundity. This is certainly the case when it comes to the meanings Hackney’s new gentrifiers ascribe to the pungent cheeses sold in the farmers market to the south east of Ridley Road, or the to the genteel ferment of compost at a garden centre to its gentrified west.²⁷ These, however, are long way from the associations that Carolina attempts to evoke in the narrative about Ridley Road market. Again, the identification of rotting fruit is not simply the identification of a particular smell or flavour. Rather, it is the identification of a ‘part’ with emotional register and moral meaning that summarises her ‘sense’ of the ‘whole’. In this instance, Carolina foregrounds the “stink” of the market, and the presence of rotting fruit, to state her sense of difference from, offence at, and superiority over, the market and its users.

Of course, Carolina’s distaste for the market is also exemplary of class-based forms of social distinction, of which smells and tastes also provide a key index (as discussed on the previous chapter. In distinction from the luxury foodies paradise of nearby Broadway farmers’ market (a loaf of artisan bread for £3.75, a bottle of olive oil for £7.00), the ambience of Ridley Road market is notably more working-class – a bleached and delapidated constellation of as many necessities as luxuries. Accordingly, it is important not to downplay the importance of a

26 Ibid.135.

27 As Erik Cohen discusses smells like those of compost which are elsewhere labelled as rotten, such as with rotten fruit, in certain contexts connote a passing moment in ecological life cycles. Eric Cohen, ‘The Broken Cycle, Smell in a Bangkok Soi’ *Ethnos*, 1988, 1(2): 37-49

class-based sense of distinction that might underly the emotional evocation of particular sensoria in Carolina's spatial narrative. As much as the difference that Carolina 'senses' between the two markets arises out of class habitus, it is, however, simultaneously the habitus that makes ethnicity. That is, there is considerable isomorphism between socio-economic class and ethnicity within Hackney's polarised demography,²⁸ a stratification reflected in the borough's various street markets:

Ridley Road market is typical of the East End described by Dick Hobbs in the late eighties: it exists at the whim of the 'markets', frequented by dislocated and frequently poor, migrants. Isolated from 'traditional social forces' of family and ethnicity, by necessity, the multicultural market's users co-curate a distinctly local culture that is "neither Jewish, Irish, West Indian or Asian, but a hybrid of these"(I will say considerably more about this in the following chapter).²⁹ Neighbouring Broadway Market, on the other hand, emerged out of a gentrified pocket of Hackney (formerly home to Tony Blair and Martin Amis), with high social capital (strong ties to family and ethnicity through friendship networks and public institutions). Accordingly it is accented with a mixture of British public school, Australian, Scandinavian and north European dialects. As one blogger commented, Broadway Market is, in distinction to Ridley Road market, "ridiculously white and middle class."³⁰ In this sense, and given the segue between Carolina's perception of the market's "stink" with her account of racially motivated aggression, it seems entirely plausible that, alongside a sense of class distinction lurks a sense of racial difference – an essentialising moral judgment ascribed to aesthetic

28 Census data from 2001 shows Dalston to be comprised 52%-White British, 21% Black or Black British. In 'senior, managerial or professional positions 66% White British, as opposed to 13% Black or Black British. For full data and charts see appendix. Statistics compiled by author from *Nomisweb*, Office of National Statistics, Accessed 19 May 2010.

29 Dick Hobbs, *Doing the Business* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 140.

30 Jeffery Hopkins, Comments on Patrick Wright 'Real England? Reflections on Broadway Market,' *Open Democracy* 23rd April 2008. www.opendemocracy.org accessed June 12th 2009.

qualities – might also might unwittingly resurface through her everyday praxis, despite her ‘colour blindness.’

It is not that a sensitivity to the market’s softer fruit is in any way indicative of an ideologically racist way of thinking about the world. Rather, in identifying the essence of the multicultural, working-class, poly-aromatic market as being a ‘stink’ of ‘rotten fruit,’ Carolina’s narrative reveals the phenomenological and emotional aspects of experience through which taxonomies of race and class are ‘felt,’ – through non-conscious feeling and emotion, if not discursive thought. Through communicating her narrative of the market, laden with emotional content, she also demonstrated how ways of sensing spatialised distinctions might be intersubjectively substantiated, providing the listener with a mode of attention through which to interpret its attendant sensoria.

Although unsensational, the admissibility of this narrative representation of the market, make stories such as this important factors shaping local social formations. Not only do they reflect and amplify sensitivities to the simultaneously moral and aesthetic boundaries of race and class.

Downstream when the squeamish stories meet influential ears, they shape the future of the market, which has for a long time been scheduled for ‘redevelopment’. I want to return to the manner in which these stories, and the everyday ways of ‘sensing’ that they reflect and promote, shape the future of the market and multicultural in east London, towards the end of the chapter. For now, however, I would like to turn back toward narratives about the market, in particular to stories encompassing disgust directed at particular flavours and smells, and extended to the whole market: Stories depicting the rotten fruit are far from the most ‘sensational’ stories told about the market, nor the most indicative of, or conducive to, the enduring ways of sensing ‘race’.

Aping Stories: The Sensuous Sediments of Colonialism

The following account of Ridley Road market was offered by Ellis, another acquaintance of mine and a regeneration consultant working in the Hackney area. Again the narrative was shared over a cup of tea, although this time over a formica table in a Jewish community centre in east London.

“So... Ridley Road Market?”

“Yeah, I cycle past it in the mornings. The centre of the bush meat trade in Europe isn't it..?”

“What do you mean? Bush meat?”

“You know? Monkey meat... Imported... They get strips of monkey meat, pile it up, cover it in rum and set alight to it. The hair all singes and the insides of it are left rare. It's like a delicacy.”

“Where did you hear this?”

“That's what they were saying here.” (Referring to the community centre we were sat in).

I laugh “Doesn't sound like it would be particularly nice,”

Ellis's eyebrows rise with incredulity before tilting back down in concern “Niceness aside mate, its how AIDS gets spread. You seriously like the market do you?” His frown turns into a scowl and he starts shaking his head at me. “It's minging isn't it? In the morning I've seen them dragging carcasses of the meat across the ground before anyone gets there. It's dirty mate. Filthy.”

I chose to transcribe Ellis's story here partly because, of the four analogous stories I collected during the ethnography, it was average in terms of sensationalism and disgust. It is also an interesting story considering its potential relationship to Ellis's profession. Like Ellis, no-one I spoke to claimed that theirs were firsthand stories, each alluding to their secondhand nature.³¹ None the less, in all but one instance the stories were attributed a veracity, and ascribed a meaning, that seemed to reflect and amplify the teller's antipathy towards Ridley Road Market. Part of that veracity no doubt stems from the fact that stories about bush meat at

³¹ One individual suggests that, while he had never seen it himself, he thinks could get me a monkey for £250.

Ridley Road first came to public awareness through a spate of national journalistic interest between 2001 and 2006. During this period, stories about Ridley Road Market and the sensation of its ‘alien horrors,’ found a special valance amidst wider discourse about crises in the Britain’s ‘multicultural experiment’ that emerged following the ‘northern riots’ and ‘9/11’. Among the most sensational, emotive and lurid, were stories such as *Daily Mail* ‘journalist’ Sue Reid’s, who followed ‘suitcases dripping with blood’ from the West African jungle to the ‘urban jungle’ of Ridley Road.³² More measured accounts of the presence of illegal meat at the market are exemplified by narratives such as that given by Angus Stickler in a 2004 BBC radio documentary:

“Ridley Road Market in Dalston, Hackney. It’s reminiscent in some ways of the markets of Cameroon... [S]tores cater for the tastes of the local community. Boxes of yams piled high, imported from Ghana, racks of brown, dried fish, plantains. You can buy virtually anything here – and until recently that included the flesh of gorilla. Richard Robinson is Principal Environmental Health Officer for the London Borough of Hackney. He accompanied police and Customs on a raid.”

“Yes, we found a quantity of antelope, monkey and gorilla, which were confirmed the speciation from the DNA. Most of it was stored in a tatty freezer out the back, which I wouldn’t have used for keeping dog food in.”³³

Indeed, as Stickler’s reliable source, and presumably police records confirm, a small number of traders at the market have indeed been prosecuted for trading illegally imported, and unfit meat from Africa. While the most publicised case arose in 2001 when a trader at the market tried to sell tantalus monkey to an undercover investigator posing as an African prince,³⁴ the

32 Sue Reid, ‘Butchered in Africa, On Sale in Britain’ *The Daily Mail*, November 30th 2004.

33 Angus Stickler and David Lewis ‘File on Four, Bush Meat’ *BBC Radio 4*, October 26th 2004.

34 ‘Illegal ‘bushmeat’ traders jailed,’ *BBC*, June 15, 2001, sec. UK, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1390125.stm>. accessed June 2007.

majority of the illegal African meat consumed in London, and that which invites legal attention, is banal ‘micro livestock’: ‘finely grained fillet steak-like-flesh’ of grass cutter (a large rodent like species), or otherwise antelopes and occasionally ant eaters.³⁵ Yet obviously while species is routinely less important to prosecutors than the fact it was illegally imported, there is a correlation between the cuddliness of the species, and the interest of the journalist.

What is particularly interesting for our purposes however, is less the facts of the trade than the central place of these stories in narratives about the market – as well as the visceral disgust routinely expressed in the gestures and voices, of those telling the story. Interesting because, these meaty stories – the nightmares beneath them and both the responses they evoke and the actions they elicit – are exemplary of the interaction between narrative, urban space, and the gut feelings for the moral boundaries of racialised culture. Accordingly I would like to spend some time now drawing on the theoretical schema in the previous chapter, explore what these stories tell us about the way in which the ‘tellers,’ ‘listeners,’ and ‘relayers’ of these stories, make sense of the world: the sense of order disturbed by the perceived consumption of primate meat, and the sensibilities that are shored up following the circulation of squirm-laden stories.

It would, however, be unfair to proceed any further without first considering the rationales offered by the story tellers as reasons for their squeamishness; as in nearly all accounts,³⁶ the disgust is explicitly rationalised in roughly the same manner. Ellis is perhaps most explicit when he states, “its how AIDS gets spread mate,” although Sue Reid’s piece for the *Daily Mail* adds several flourishes. Speaking about the discovery of new viruses emerging through

35 Charles Champion ‘Boiling battle over bushmeat,’ *This is London* 12/04/02
<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/article-920870-boiling-battle-over-bushmeat.do> accessed 13/05/2008

36 Rationales were offered in including both the journalistic accounts, Ellis’s account and one other offered by one of Ellis’s colleagues, contracted at Hackney Council.

“expert” analysis of West African fauna, Reid writes:

“Humans are believed to contract the virus by exposure to the blood and body fluids of wild apes... So it follows that the virus is almost certainly present in the illegal bushmeat being sold in Britain. No one knows what the long term effect of the virus is on human health, but the potential danger is here. Now.”

In both Reid’s and Ellis’ narratives, the emotional content is explained as having nothing to do with the tellers’ subjective, or culturally specific way of sensing. Rather, their disgust is rationalised as being routed in the objectivity of science’s extra-somatic sensory devices – in particular, the zoonotic contagions they reveal. Occasionally, the narratives make additional reference to the endangered nature of the species being consumed, with disgust being rationalised through the contravention of green ethical codes.³⁷ Certainly, there is no denying the extent to which the embodiment of various shades of green ethics codetermine the teller’s unease at the alleged practices of bushmeat trade and consumption, as well as the space in which it is perceived to take place. There is, however, something slightly disingenuous about this deferral to the objective gazes of medicine and ecology. It is hardly, for instance, the case that consuming primate meat has ever been an accepted practice in modern European life. Even Calvin W. Schwabe, whose remarkable encyclopaedia, *Unmentionable Cuisine*, contains recipes for “skewered turtle meat,” “extramadrurian cat stew” and *hachi no sanagai* or “wasp pupae,” finds recipes for primate meat too ‘unmentionable’ to mention.³⁸ As unsurprising as this sounds, the abjection of monkey meat is nonetheless worth some further consideration as there are specific cultural coordinates determining this squeamishness, and the histories through which it is trained. In the case of primate meat trade and consumption, I want to

37 “Illegal ‘bushmeat’ traders jailed,” *BBC*, June 15, 2001, sec. UK, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1390125.stm>. accessed June 2007.

38 Schwabe does, however, provide recipes for grass cutter, a type of rodent which is by all accounts the most mundane and commonly imported form of ‘bush meat’. For more see: Calvin W. Schwabe, *Unmentionable Cuisine* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1979).

argue that the revulsion evident in narratives about it is related to a sensibility – a way of sensing and interpreting what we and others eat – that was once central to the exercise of colonial forms of power.

Writers and thinkers have long gravitated towards alimentary practices to make inferences about the lived culture of an individual or group, taking the lines a culture or individual draws between meat and flesh to be particularly instructive. With a *raison d'être* of providing Europe and Europeans with a narrative that confirmed their self-belief in their being a teleological end point in both biology and culture, stories about the meat eaten by others proliferated in eighteenth and nineteenth century European literature and scientific treatise.³⁹ Rehashed accounts of cannibalism ‘observed’ by sixteenth and seventeenth-century explorers, especially, allowed the growing audiences of both literary fiction and fact to vicariously ‘sense’ the simultaneously geographical and moral boundaries of their superior culture and race. In some respects, the imputation of alimentary practices such as cannibalism trumped even physiognomy as a means of identifying ‘savagery’. Certainly, this was likely the case for taxonomic founder Carl Linnaeus who, Giorgio Agamben notes, saw little observable physiological difference within the genus *homo*, save for small differences in hair distribution and tooth patterns. Accordingly he defined *Homo Sapiens* (knowing man), not by physical traits as he did *all* other creatures, but by having a specific ability: being able “to recognise himself as human,” and to sense other humans as human.⁴⁰ According to these criteria, cannibalism provided an off the peg practice for writers, explorers and scientists of all sorts, to instantly place all of those accused of cannibalism, and irrespective of physiognomy,⁴¹ as originating from, and existing

39 Ibid.

40 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open, Man and Animal* (California: University of Stanford Press 2004), 24.

41 William Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 48.

somewhere outside of, humanity – owing to their inability to sense their own, and others' humanity.

I mention the difficulty that Linnaeus had in establishing anatomical differences between members of the genus *homo* (later renamed *primates*), partly because the distinction is no clearer today: Far from making species distinctions clearer, biomedicine's new extra-somatic senses, which have revealed minuscule percentage point differences of DNA, only amplify the fuzziness separating members of the primate family.⁴² Accordingly, the attribution of cannibalism to a species, or group, retains a purpose; at least for the purposes of folk taxonomy. As a cursory look through British tabloids of any given year will tell you, the cannibal remains a powerful figure, providing a morally defined community with a monster that stands beyond its edge, and against which a sense of popular probity can be readily mobilised.⁴³ Given, then, the extent to which many apes are enduringly sensed to be 'our cousins', it is not too much of a stretch to interpret the disgust within stories about the consumption of primate meat as having a similar origins – and function – to that which was directed at the cannibal: The disgust directed the primate eater, dealer and hunter arises from their perceived lack of ability to sense, with their eyes and taste-buds, the distorted humanity of their quarry.⁴⁴ Certainly this seems to be the source of Sue Reid's disgust when describing how:

42 Chimpanzee Sequencing and Analysis Consortium, "Initial sequence of the chimpanzee genome and comparison with the human genome," *Nature* 437, no. 7055 (September 1, 2005): 69-87.

43 "Boy 'skinned and eaten' by his cannibal cult family after being held captive in a cellar," *The Daily Mail*, 21st June 2008 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1027962/Boy-skinned-eaten-cannibal-cult-family.html#ixzz0n4qWAK> OO Accessed 22nd June 2008.

"Human flesh 'on sale in London,'" *The Observer*, November 3, 2002, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2002/nov/03/ukcrime.antonybarnett>.

44 Certainly the blurriness between humans and monkeys is a trope deployed in the film, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, to allude to savagery' Therein 'Indy's' melodramatic squirms at the bowl of chilled monkey brains (actually an old Chinese custom) serve to establish boundaries between himself, and his savage Hindi hosts. The inappropriate attribution of primate consumption to Indian Hindus, for whom monkeys are traditionally revered, was one of the many imperialist slip ups that led to the temporary banning of the film in certain parts of India. See A. D. V. de S. Indraratna *Globalisation and South Asia: Retrospect and Prospect* (Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science, 1999). *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (Paramount, 1984).

... the ape often adopts a pleading expression and holds out its paw to the killers... Tragically for the animal – and perhaps for all mankind – the bush meat hunters of Africa take no notice at all.”⁴⁵

In this instance, the stomach churn that Reid experiences, and then communicates, accompanies the elevation of the ape to the human, and the relegation of primate meat dealers and hunters to a space somewhere between beast and human, a space also occupied by cannibals.

Importantly, the example suggests that squirms within the narratives do not solely result from the objective threat posed by zoonotic contagions. Rather, from the folkish sensibility through which ‘humanity’ and its boundaries can be traced through particular practices; not least of which is intra genus-dining, the *insensitivity* of which poses a threat to “all mankind.”

However, as with accusations of cannibalism previously, disgust directed at primate meat consumption seemingly arises less from perceived threats to the cosmopolitan “all mankind,” than perceived threats to the peculiar culture, of which the tellers’ sensibility is part that is mistaken for all mankind. Of course, truly diseased meat, be it bovine, swine, avian or primate, presents various scales of threat to a populace’s health. And of course, the routine slaughter of sentient creatures, cousins, and endangered species especially, indicates the normalised brutality that life is seemingly subjected to in many parts of the world. These various shades of green sensitivity, however, coincide unfortunately with sensuous sediments of colonialism: historically bequeathed ways of mistaking the boundaries of a specific of sense of propriety – boundaries marked by gut reactions to combinations of gesture, smell and sound – for the boundaries of a universal humanity.

45 Sue Reid, ‘Butchered in Africa, On Sale in Britain,’ *The Daily Mail*, November 30th 2004

Ultimately the fleshy foreground of these stories, set against a background of “cassava [and] dried brown fish,”⁴⁶ heighten the sensitivities of both the teller and the reader or listener to aesthetic differences, and offer a way of interpreting these as sensitivities to moral distinctions. In this way, the narratives about bushmeat, and the squirms within them, shore up a sensibility through which, *anything* in the market that reaches the attention of hypersensitive ears eyes and noses is experienced as a potential threat.⁴⁷ As I will summarise below, it is through the circulation and exaggeration of these narratives, and the effects that they have on the manner in which spaces such as Ridley Road market are made sense of, that racially inflected forms of distinction, continue to be made, within the multicultural contexts of east London.

Sensation, Aesthetics and The Market

In a famous essay, William Arens controversially suggested that the cannibal, who was depicted by early explorers of the Americas alongside giants, mermaids and tree people, was primarily a ‘useful’ exaggeration.⁴⁸ Regardless of the extent of actual cannibalistic practices, exaggerated stories about cannibalism, Arens argued, secured funding for further colonial expeditions and missionary activities. They were also useful in the sense that they transferred attention from the brutality of the colonial explorers on to the colonised.⁴⁹ As I will argue below, it is in this sense (rather than in the ‘similarity’ of their meals) that an analogy between stories about the cannibal and the alleged primate meat eaters of Ridley Road market might

46 Stickler, *Ibid.* and David Lewis ‘File on Four, Bush Meat’ *BBC Radio 4* Tuesday 26th October 2004 - Aired at 20:40 “There is a specific issue at Ridley Road, [it] generates a large amount of the crime that takes place in the area.” *Review of Market Provision in Hackney*, Hackney Council 2006, 14.

47 The casual conversation with the cycling regeneration consultant that opened this section echoed chats with several others for whom even familiar cuts of meat, placed into the context of Ridley Road, appear to many as dirty and far more anomalous and alien than they most likely are.

48 William Arens *The Man Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (New York: Oxford University Press 1979), 48.

49 Ironically but perhaps unsurprisingly, it was later reported that some of these explorers themselves committed acts of cannibalism, when stranded in pack ice, or on a remote island. See: Andrew Lambert, *Franklin* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 1.

be strongest.⁵⁰ What then, are the barbarous expeditions funded through, yet obfuscated through accusatory stories about ‘goings on’ at Ridley Road?

Of course, as with most accounts of barbarism in Africa, the narratives above tend to externalise the transnational market in West African minerals, wood and oil of which the bush meat trade is part.⁵¹ A little closer to home, however, stories about abject meat also obscure and feed into various forms of far more prosaic, but nonetheless significant, forms of habitat ‘capitalisation’. As mentioned, between 2001 and 2006, stories about the meat sold at Ridley Road coincided with a host of other stories about the area including reports of illegal gambling and drug dealing, as well as associations with people trafficking and ritual child abuse, feeding snowballing public anxiety about the alleged crises of British ‘multiculturalism’.⁵² Significantly for the market, and the market’s users, these stories also coincided with the accumulation of a local budgetary deficit, and the realisation that that deficit could be significantly reduced if the local council realised “potential disposal opportunities... of land for residential development” and restructured the management of their assets to a more profitable model.⁵³ As a result, a prescription was developed, aimed at aiding the area’s path to profit.

50 For an analytical and historically rich account of the jointly national and international techniques of colonialism and their role in the production of race and the ghetto see: Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993), 187-193.

51 What trade in bush meat in London that does take place, is also entangled in an assemblage that incorporates European tastes for teak patio furniture, digital technology (made with West African heavy metals), contracts between African governments and European forestry concessions and the exposure of the forest innards to displaced, protein and cash starved families. It is precisely this network of events and practice, that has precipitated a global trade in endangered species (both arboreal and mammalian). For more on the complex assemblage of which the bush meat trade is part see: Dale Peterson and Karl Ammann, *Eating Apes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 104-125.

52 Angus Stickler and David Lewis ‘File on Four, Bush Meat’ *BBC Radio 4*, Tuesday 26th October 2004 - Aired at 20:40. Witchcraft case sparks abuse fear,” *BBC News* Saturday, 4 June, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4608943.stm>. ‘Review of Market Provision in Hackney,’ *Hackney Council* 2006, 14.

53 ‘Summary of Accounts, 2007/2008,’ *Hackney Council*, www.hackney.gov.uk/summary-accounts-2007-08.doc, accessed 12/04/2009. About Open Dalston, “Ridley Road Market plans – make your views known,” *OPEN Dalston*, October 13, 2009, <http://opendalston.blogspot.com/2009/10/ridley-road-market-plans-make-you-views.html>, accessed 15/10/2009.

Initial action started in 2007, when a set of double yellow lines were painted along the length of the market. This left any traders who had not paid the sizeable fee to park nearby, to be fined as they parked vehicles to unload their produce – which they had to do because the market ‘store area’ had also been bolted closed. In the next year, the market’s electricity was also cut off for six months, apparently in response to the illegal siphoning of electricity by a handful of traders;⁵⁴ Dependent as they are on electricity, it was notably a long-established collective of halal butchers that were amongst the first to go out of business.⁵⁵ Not long after the meat had been removed, “Hackney bean-counters” went “bananas” stepping up attempts to repeatedly fine market traders for negligible weights and measures ‘offences.’⁵⁶ While local groups of conservationists and a loose traders association put up significant resistance to these measures, they were met with a defensive stance from the borough’s administrators; most notably from the borough’s mayor, who characterised the market’s defenders as conservative and members of the “keep Hackney crap brigade.”⁵⁷

Despite the claims of some of his detractors, the borough’s mayor was not necessarily revealing his own, personal ‘racist’, or ‘snobbish’ perception of the market by referring to its environs as ‘crap’. Rather, it seems he, like the consultants he was hiring, was simply channeling the view of Ridley Road derived from the perspective of ‘The (property) Market’.

54 It was justified by the mayor as a proportional response to the non payment, by some traders, for electricity. Hear, *The Hackney Podcast*, “Edition 2: Shoots, Leaves and Shops,” August, 2008, <http://hackneypodcast.co.uk/2008/08/edition-2-shoots-leaves-and-shops/> accessed June 2009.

55 Notably they were swiftly replaced by a glass fronted, ‘cleaner’ and pristinely fitted out chemists and cosmetic shop – animal byproducts removed from sight.

56 ‘Bean Counters Go Bananas’ *Open Dalston* <http://opendalston.blogspot.com/2008/03/hackney-beancounters-go-bananas-in.html> accessed June 2008, ‘Traders told to get out’ *Open Dalston* <http://opendalston.blogspot.com/2008/10/dalstons-market-traders-told-to-get-out.html>, accessed May 2008.

57 “Hackney’s Mayor Pipe Smears Children’s Laureate,” *Open Dalston*, June 1, 2008, <http://opendalston.blogspot.com/2008/06/hackneys-mayor-pipe-smears-childrens.html>.

From this influential perspective, Ridley Road Market, or at least parts of it, were a significant obstacle to profitable development in the area, partially it seems because its concomitant sensoria were repeatedly interpreted as being beyond the simultaneously moral and aesthetic boundaries of its desired investors' cultural identity. As Tim Edensnor's multisensory analysis of 'tourist enclaves' demonstrates, the imperatives of The Market are to ensure that the sensory ambience of a given space, is calibrated to the sensory repertoire of the most profitable visitor. To meet the commercial imperatives of the tourism industry, for instance, the tourist enclave has to sit first and foremost, within the sensory repertoire of the globally mobile individual that they wish to attract: 'Unusual' sensations must be kept at bay, specific symbols of dirt screened out, while soundscapes, tactilities, smells and scenes must be carefully maintained.⁵⁸ Accordingly, a remarkable proportion of hotels across the world have the same bleached white walls, polished smooth floors and precise olfactory zoning: mildly woody floral incense around reception, with hints of lemon and pine wherever cleanliness needs to be reassured, and concentrations of coconut and sun lotion where bodies mix. The only thing reminding the tourist that they are in a unique location, are the 'themed dining' areas, and the vaguely 'local' sounding instruments, woven through cover versions of 'globally' familiar songs. It is not that these spaces are in any way devoid of sensation, and as such unconnected to cultural identity, as Marc Augé's description of such "non places" would suggest.⁵⁹ Rather, they are in fact full of sensory stimulus. It is simply that the stimulus are those from within the habitus of the globally mobile tourist – no sensory surprises – allowing those who can afford to enter into the enclave, to maintain the sense perceptual equilibrium peculiar to their increasingly ubiquitous, majoritarian, cultural identity.

⁵⁸ Tim Edensnor 'Sensing Tourist Spaces' in Claudio Minca and Tim Oakes, *Travels in Paradox* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 31-33.

⁵⁹ Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), 78.

While Edensor's analysis is of the engineering of sensual experience of tourist space, he and others have witnessed similar, if less pronounced tendencies in the development of contemporary Western – and Westernised – urban spaces, by which I mean the centres of neo-liberal global capitalism.⁶⁰ Consider the exquisite regulation of olfactory zones and auditory textures in new super-malls like west London's Westfield Centre. Or the ongoing attempt to ban the cooking of food on Delhi's streets in areas scheduled for redevelopment and international investment.⁶¹ Or for that matter, consider the creeping conversion of Old Spitalfields Market, a mile away from Ridley Road Market, from a pungent and crowded fruit and veg market, to a constellation of high-end chain shops and designer boutiques. In the last instance, consider the remarkable rise in property prices precipitated by the reodourisation, reauralisation and haptic alteration of that space.⁶² In each instance, the sequestering and zoning of sensoria deemed outside of the habitus of particular cultural identity, and their replacement with flavours and aromas from within the sensory repertoire of its intended users, is integral to the production of sensual space into which money will move. And we know that in contemporary London, as in many other cities, differences in wealth and stratified cultural identity are partially convergent phenomena.

To reiterate, it is not those that those administering over the tourist enclave, nor the 'crap' market are in any sense ideologically racist. However, the hegemonic sensibility that it is their

60 J Douglas Porteous, "Smellscape" In Jim Drobnick (ed.), *The Smell Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2006).
Tim Edensor, 'The Culture of the Indian Street' in Nicholas R. Fyfe, *Images of the Street* (London, New York: Routledge, 1998).
Tim Edensor 'Moving Through the City' in D. Bell and A. Haddour (eds.) *City Visions* (London: Prentice Hall, 2000).
David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1989), 78.
Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (London: Verso, 2006).

61 These efforts, which have been widely reported were, like planned efforts to 'mediate' Ridley Road, preceded by surveys as to the hygiene of the area's patrons and traders. See:
Somini Sengupta, "Delhi Snacks Move Up From the Street," *The New York Times*, April 18, 2007, sec. Dining & Wine,
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/18/dining/18indi.html?pagewanted=all>.

62 For more on this development see:
Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*, (Lond, New York: Routledge, 1996)
Marcus Binney & Judith Heywood, "Are Spitalfields' Georgian homes under threat again?," *The Times* (UK), October 9, 2009,
http://property.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/property/buying_and_selling/article6865899.ece.

imperative to placate, and which they must occasionally inhabit, bears the phenomenological traces of racism: the attribution to an unknown smell drifting unpredictably on the anarchic breezes of the open-air street, with an embodied sense of ‘crapness,’ of moral inferiority, and a cultural, if not biological, threat. Whether strategically circulated or not,⁶³ amidst these imperatives, salacious and sensational stories about Ridley Road Market attain a considerable utility; intensifying sensitivity to *all* olfactory, gustatory and auditory differences; and translating these sensitivities into gut feelings for the moral boundaries of ‘cosmopolitan’ culture and gaining implicit consent for efforts to regulate and transform the market area.⁶⁴

Conclusion: Gut Feelings

This chapter has sought to explore the relationship between spatial narratives, the sensuous experience of space, and both the actualisation and spatialisation of social distinctions through that experience. In particular it has aimed to explicate the extent to which spatial narratives reflect the ‘dreams and nightmares’ underlying the tellers’ sensuous perception of space. If this is not always evident in the language used in spatial narratives, then it is often clear in the emotional expression woven through them. Relationships with space, and feelings towards it, are also evident in the non-visual sensory details included and excluded, in the

63 There is no evidence to suggest that Hackney Council played any part in the deliberate propagation of negative stories about the market. They did, however, do little to provide a counter narrative, and offered up their own health and safety inspectors to several journalists interested in the market.

64 I have to add here that, since the time of first researching this chapter, it has in some respects, become a more of a historical document than was intended. In 2008, the latest financial crisis significantly impacted on the viability of the wholesale ‘upgrading’ of the Dalston Junction and Ridley Road Market area to high-end housing. One result, as an architect working on plans for market area informed me, has been a considerable drop in local council meetings, of references to the ‘master-plan’ of which the market’s larger redevelopment was scheduled to be a part, and several potential investors have backed away from the ‘risky’ area. While the yellow lines remain painted down the market, inspector’s incursions in to the market have also, according to one trader, become less frequent, with the weights and measures prosecutions deemed officially to not be within “the public interest.” In a relatively swift change in fortune, the market itself is now scheduled for a comparatively small, and seemingly benevolent £1million pound refurbishment, as part of the grand ‘deadline urbanism’ that is the 2012 Olympic Games development. The contingency of ‘The Market’ has, for the short term, allowed this particular part of the borough to remain “crap.” None the less, several buildings in the area were, over the course of this research, demolished and replaced with new ‘loft style’ housing blocks, for which the developers negotiated the privilege of building none of legally required percentage of social housing.

narratives, and the meaning ascribed to them. Reference and response to smells, or perceived 'tastes' sensed in space, especially, reveal the everyday phenomenology through which social distinctions are sensed and reproduced. More than simply 'reflecting' the experience of the tellers, however, the spatial narratives presented above interact with a sensuous experience of space: They intensify corporeal sensitivity to difference by foregrounding over-determinedly abject sensoria, and attaching moral meaning to the sensuous experience of a given spatial aesthetic. The result, in this instance, is that spatial narratives have 'real' consequences for the tellers of the story and listeners receptive to them, changing or exacerbating the way that they make sense of the world. They also have 'real' consequences for the space being narrativised; perpetuating the spatialisation of social distinctions, the reproduction of social divisions, and all associated structural inequality.

It should go without saying that anxiety-reflecting, and squirm-intensifying, stories about rotten fruit and strange meat, are in a great many respects far removed from the repulsed fascist framing of 'Yiddley Road's alien horrors'. Contemporary accounts of the market are also relatively removed from the popular nationalist representations of the market in the seventies and eighties – they certainly precipitate far fewer acute bouts of violence. There are, however, analogies across the narrative representations of Ridley Road Market from over the last century, analogies both in terms of the ways of sensing they reflect, but also the social formations they inflect. Perhaps the most striking analogy is that the narratives presented here reflect and amplify an enduring hypersensitivity to Ridley Road Market, a corporeal reaction to 'something' within it, that marks it as being distinct from other spaces. In particular, the narrative fragments suggest a sensitivity to aesthetic differences that are experienced as a markers of a spatialised limit. What has changed, of course, is both the type and salience of the boundary that the market's sensoria are perceived as being beyond the 'edge' of.

Hamm and Mosely's fascist narratives about the market attempted to harness the corporeal excitement of the market's users and neighbours – their sensitivity to the olfactory, auditory and gustatory differences – and explicitly render this experience as evidence of the boundaries of a biological race or species; converting the gut responses to difference, into a gut feeling for the boundaries of race. The National Front and the red-top press accounts of the market from the eighties render the corporeal excitement elicited by the ever-changing market as a 'gut feeling' for the limits of an ethno-nationalist conception of British culture – a more specifically moral, though nonetheless essential difference. Carolina's narrative representation of the market is different for its absence of any explicit discussion about race or culture, emerging out of a socio-historical context more avowedly at home with cosmopolitan living than the past. Nonetheless, her narrative once again frames Ridley Road as being beyond a limit, a personal no-go area. This was articulated partly through the language and rhetorical devices she uses. However, it was clearer through the references to non-visual components of the market, and emotional response to them revealing a gut sense for 'moral' boundaries of the cosmopolitanism she inhabits. An analogous way of making sense of the multicultural, working class space of the street market, is reflected, and shored up emphatically, by the circulation and notable exaggeration of stories concerning the consumption of illegal meat therein. There is an underlying interpretation in all the 'meat' narratives, of the gut feeling, experienced and communicated by the teller, as a sign that the market is beyond the limits of a paradoxically 'cosmopolitan' yet particular sense of propriety. As a result it is also experienced as beyond the aesthetic sensibilities central to the property market, sensibilities that increasingly pass for the universal morality. Which is a shame because, as Sophie Watson argues, Ridley Road Market itself, is actually integral to one of the most valuable, and diverse,

forms of multiculturalism that the city co-curates.⁶⁵ As the following chapter will elucidate, this is a trans-cultural social formation, partially woven through relationships with the commingling aromas and flavours of the market, reviled in the narrative representations of it.

The previous two chapters sought to place squirms directed at a seafood stand and a street market within a social, historical and political context, to reveal the reproduction of social formations, through sensory habits and ‘gut feelings’, and the ensuing spatialisation of social distinctions. The following two chapters attempt to nose about these two locales further.

However, rather than focussing on the sensational foreground of these spaces as sensed by outsiders, the following chapters delve deeper into the ambient background of these locales; between the blind spots, deaf areas and amnesic zones of space as sensed through dominant sensibilities. Exploring the relationship between sensory experience and social formation from the everyday perspective of life within these spaces – rather than narratives about them or the passing view from outside – the following chapters explore the relationship between the senses and the sustenance of complex transnational identities and new forms of urban culture.

65 Sophie Watson and David Studdert, “Markets as sites for social interaction: spaces of diversity,” *Open Spaces Series*, (The Policy Press: 2006), 27.

Blends of Global Aromas: The Sensory Production of a Local Multiculture



Ridley Road Market, January 2009, author's photograph.

The previous section focused primarily on east London as experienced by a collection of squeamish bodies. In conclusion, it suggested that squirms often resulted from the perception of leakage between cherished cultural categories and the (mis)recognition of a threat. These ‘threats’ were sensed through the nose, the fingers, the taste-buds, and the gut feelings that ensued acted to fortify senses of distinction. In summary I argued that social boundaries are articulated and spatialised through historical and habitual ways of sensing the world, recreating social strata within the multitude of bodies filling cities, and mapping those strata on to urban space. In some instances, these sensibilities appeared as the phenomenological legacies of colonialism. Other aspects of experience were informed by local histories of gendered power and the industrial division of labour. None of these factors, however, works upon the body separately from the other. Together they accumulate in the body, tethering it to impersonal processes of social stratification, through the senses.

Without a doubt then, sensuous experience is informed by, and shapes, processes of social stratification. However, as the following chapter will argue, there are also instances in which the sensuous experience of urban environments are imbricated in dissolving boundaries, disrupting processes of social reproduction and producing new shapes of cross-cultural, interstitial social formations. That is, although taste and smell are related to the reproduction of seemingly unshakeable senses of self and culture, under certain conditions, the same portals also open out the body on to the sensory worlds of others, transforming both senses of self, and the culture that is lived through the body. Nowhere, I will argue herein, is this more obvious than when considering the role of the senses of smell and taste within the context of an environment as an east London street market. This chapter argues that, as a result of its geographical location, its history, as well as its position within the wider political economy of London, the sensory repertoire of east London’s peculiar local cultures have been informed by

converging trajectories, through which the unconscious strata of countless cultures have become entwined with the everyday routines of others. Moreover, not only has the convergence of historical trajectories and sensory worlds in east London produced new peculiarly local, yet globally-inflected ways making sense, but as this chapter demonstrates, it has also led to the production of new sensory artefacts: foods, perfumes and music, objects around which new social formations, and coalesce.

In order to illustrate these processes further, the following section focuses on the smudging of social strata through the sedimentation of multiple sensibilities on bodies within the aforementioned east London street markets. Initially, this will be conducted by way of a close analysis of the ambient background of Ridley Road Market. Case studies from within the market, primarily a stall selling home-brewed soaps, and a long-established bagel bakery, will be used to demonstrate the accretion of sensibilities and sensoria from numerous cultures within the everyday life of the market, destabilising normative senses of distinction and sustaining a vibrant everyday multicultural. The second chapter in this section extends the analysis of multicultural with a return to Tubby Isaac's seafood stand, exploring the hybridity and transcultural formation sustained by an emblematic site of 'white working-class' London. Here we will trace the hybridity behind the sensuous facets of a culture rarely thought of itself as having a hybrid biography.

In both sites, Tubby Isaac's and Ridley Road Market, I will suggest that relationships with the marbled sensoria of the space reflect histories of under-acknowledged inter-cultural dialogue, conducted at the level of bodily disposition, through the accretion of new sensibilities, and the sharing of one's own cultural milieu with others. These processes of blending in, simultaneous to processes of blending out, are central to the transformation of social strata, which although

fortified by the senses, are also destabilised by the steady acquisition, fusion and creation of sensuous affinities.

An Olfactory Inventory of Everyday Multiculture

I want to start the empirical component of this chapter by reintroducing the ambience of Ridley Road Market to the reader from a different angle, by way of a narrative account of the market's aromascape, an inventory of multicultural life in east London as it appeared through my nose. While it might be considered desirable to actually represent the aromascape for the reader's consumption, it goes without saying that beyond the world of science fiction and hi-tech perfumeries aroma is notoriously difficult to replicate. With this in consideration the aromascape is represented here in 'narrative form'. That is, as it emerged through my nose. The sensuous deficiencies of this mode of representation have further limitations. They are compounded by the fact that I am not, it must be noted, an experienced "flaireur"¹ adept at picking out every volatile chemical with my nose. Therefore there are most likely elements of the aromascape which were indiscernible and, therefore, missing. As a result, what follows is only a partial account of the odours within the market, a list of those to which I was sensitive. The inventory was compiled in the morning, on a Thursday in early June and moved up through the centre of the market between its main stalls, then back down the side of the market behind the main stalls and in front of the open fronted permanent units to their side.

I am initiated into the market stalls by a strong smell of fruit commingling with the sweetish petrol smell from the slow-moving traffic on the main road nearby. As the fruit stall is approached it is possible to discern the fragrances of different fruits: mangoes, melons and bananas, each revealing itself to me in respective order as I move my nose closer. These smells seem to gain strength from

¹ Jim Drobnick, *The Smell Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006), 163.

the fruit stalls to both my left and right which draw my attention away from the cloying petroleum. As I move past these vendors a very familiar warm and doughy baking smell enters my nose, followed swiftly by a blend of South Asian spices: coriander, cumin and cardamom, the cardamom being particularly strong. The sources are not immediately discernible but upon inspection it becomes clear that the baking smell is coming from the local bagel bakery, a residue of the old Jewish community that populated the market in the mid twentieth century. The spice, it seems is coming from a delicatessen next door and its tandooried meats. Both are hidden from sight behind the odourless clothes stalls to the left of me. Moving on, the smell of fresh fish, or rather the smell of the sea (as fresh fish rarely smells of fish), makes its presence fully sensible – having been there, I now realise, at a low level since entry on to the market. The source of the smell is clear: a cluster of fishmongers, the visual recognition of which notifies me of the aroma's pre-existing presence in my nose. I simply hadn't registered it before. This cluster is interspersed with relatively odourless, yet visually and aurally aggressive toy stalls. The simulated baby cries, bleeping and whirring coming from these pieces of plastic are audible above those of real babies passing by in push-chairs. Next my momentum moves me into a clearing lined with three sizzling hot food stalls. From these arises the dough-nutty smell of fried dumplings and salt-fish patties which mixes with the unmistakable frying smell of bacon sandwiches and seemingly oxymoronic 'halal hot dogs'. I move on still, past a handful more fruit and vegetable stalls, these ones with less fruit and more vegetables. Notably there is also a very strong smell of fresh peppermint coming from one of the stalls on the right – while I want to remove personal experience from this account, the extent to which this made me crave new potatoes, Mojitos and Arabian mint tea for the rest of the day is undeniable.

A turn of the head to the left leaves the smell of mint behind and confronts me with a distinctive fusion of smells — polythene bags, dusty factory storage and mass transit — emanating from a luggage stall, most likely from the filling that is stuffed into the luggage to demonstrate just how much it can hold. A mix of this smell and again the sea water and fish then washes past, until I arrive at a fruit stall where platefuls of mango slices are offered for the delectation of potential customers. The smell emanating from them is strong, and arresting enough to initially obscure the source from visibility, by convening a crowd of bustling elbows and handbags.

The walk continues and here, about halfway up the market, is an entirely new set of fragrances hitherto absent from the aromascape: 'Egyptian Musk,' 'Sandalwood,' 'Laxmi Pooja' – variations

on the type of otherworldly woody musk familiar everywhere from Greek Orthodox churches and Buddhist temples to sultry candle lit bathtubs. Although some of this incense is coming from a stall selling only incense sticks, the majority of incense aroma derives from Ali's ongoing efforts to ward off the seagull attacking a neighbouring fishmonger. This scent of incense is intensified by a neighbouring stall – again incense, but more subtle and complicated by an array of oils and essential extracts combined in large handmade blocks of soap.

Onward still. Here the pattern breaks. Before I had been passing aromas. Now an aroma passes me. A refuse collector barges past with his bin on wheels. The aroma is simply that noxious conglomeration of smells characteristic of a kitchen bin un-emptied for days in hot weather. It passes but in the same direction as I am moving, leaving a faint trail all along behind it. Attention to this smell is diverted by the smell of marijuana. A particularly dense and sweet-smelling marijuana. My eyes follow my nose away from the passing bin and towards the crevices behind the stalls where the aroma seems to get stronger. The source of the odour is, as with most things that are illicit, invisible.

No sooner had it 'appeared' than it quickly disappears behind the odour rising out of a large blue 'EuroBin' labelled "Strictly Not For Human Consumption" – a label that I don't see until its too late. I move my head over the bin only to be slapped in the face by the powerful but highly localised smell of fish guts and decomposing cardboard. I quickly move on towards the top of the market past many smells which have already been encountered earlier: polythene and fruit in various combinations. The smell of rotting refuse also strengthens approaching the top of the market (a direct correlate incidentally with reductions in the prices of fruit, which are least expensive and generally overripe furthest from the main street). At the top of the market a large truck is parked ready to descend and collect the piles of cardboard and overripe produce discarded by traders. Upon reaching the funky truck at the top of the market, I turn to descend back down, taking a different route: between the stalls and the permanent units to their side.

What is immediately apparent is an entirely different combination of smells, most of which were sequestered from the initial stretch of the walk by the architecture of the market. The first encounter on the descent is with that of fresh butchered meat — a generic smell coupled with slightly lighter, mustier overtones emanating from the drying calves' legs piled neatly to the side of

the meat stalls. This slightly lighter meaty smell quickly becomes infused with the very particular smell of dried fish. This is distinctly different from the smell of the fresh fish which, as already mentioned, smells more of the sea than fish. Rather it is a subtle smell, like crossing a tin of sardines with dry mixed nuts and sunflower seeds. This is fused by the smell of a whole host of spices that intermingle – with cinnamon and cumin being the most obtrusive. All of which (the fish and the spices), radiate from the string of permanent units selling the cuisine of West Africa and the Caribbean — the smell of most of which is encapsulated in tins and heat-sealed bags but still some manages to escape. The smell of incense again drifts out from one of these stalls as a trader lights another stick to ward off the pungency of the fishmonger beside him. Continuing to move down the market are more of the same. Having passed another butcher, again there is another brief and conspicuous gap in aroma as I make my way past the entrance to a nearby shopping mall, the air from which, smelling of new trainers, sweetshops and recently shampooed carpet, is being pumped out and clears a space in the aromascape of the market. Then onward again, nearly at the bottom where I started, past more fresh fish and a return to the smells of mixed fruit – first gala melons, then mangoes followed by bananas, then the sweet smell of petrol.

The city ‘looks’ somewhat different, when you, stop, as it were, ‘looking at it’ doesn’t it?

Frequently represented as a site of generic ‘otherness’, the olfactory inventory of Ridley Road market produces a unique portrait of culture in Dalston. Following my nose as it moves through the market space, if nothing else, the image of multiculturalism of east London becomes at once, more vivid and more complex and incomprehensible, producing a sensuous image of urban culture that thwarts prevailing sociological understanding. Within the inventory, and the culinary and aromatic cultures it indexes, it is possible to find sensoria transplanted from South Asia, northern Europe, rural England, the Caribbean and West Africa, amongst many other locations. However, beyond simply bringing into relief the number of different culinary cultures currently active in Dalston, the aromatic inventory also provides a portrait of the area’s demographic history; the sensuous sediments of which its current culture finds nutrition. That is, perhaps more than any other modality of spatial representation, the

olfactory inventory testifies to the fact that, while home to a multitude of different migratory waves, no arrival at the market has entirely washed away the next.

However, and this a significant limitation of the textual translation of the olfactory experience, in singling out separate smells as isolable units, the inventory of ‘essences’ misses something very important about the market. That is, in painting a portrait of separate essences, it loses sight of the continual blending of aromas in the air of the market. And in doing so, it loses sight of the smudging of cultural boundaries within the everyday lives of the market’s patrons.

This is not just a colourful metaphor or pun on essence. On the contrary, as I hope to argue below, as sensoria (smells, flavours) commingle, so do the cultural sensibilities (tastes) through which they are interpreted. To bring the isomorphism of mingling aromas and cultural boundaries into focus, however, requires a higher-resolution portrait of the market’s aromas and flavours, and a consideration of their role in the actual lives of the market’s patrons.

Accordingly, the analysis now zooms in and expands on a location about halfway through the olfactory inventory above, surrounded by wafts of sandalwood, lavender, nutmeg, palm oil, paraffin and cinnamon. More specifically it hones in on the large aromatic cloud that shrouds a stall from which Dickson, a man in his early thirties, dispenses a range of handmade soaps and creams he makes in a nearby workshop.

Dickson has lived in east London since having moved from Ghana over eight years ago. He has worked on the market for six years having first started there with a ‘casual pitch’,² before getting a permanent pitch and storage years later. He speaks in an accent similar to that of

² A casual pitch is one that is allocated by the council inspectors when somebody with a permanent pitch fails to turn up before 9:00 am offering entrepreneurs a vital opportunity to find space amidst the congestion, and allowing the council to rent the same space twice.

many of the traders around him, a voice inflected with Jamaican Patois, West African cadence, the odd cockney ‘dark L’ or ‘soft R’, and occasional consonants enunciated with Arabic definition.³ His hair is styled into dreadlocks and, in a contemporary spin on Caribbean Garveyites conspicuous identification with Africa, the African Londoner wears a gold and green Jamaica shaped pendant around his neck. Despite a professed lack of explicit religious or cultural affinity, most of those at the market that know him, (and lots do), call him “Rasta.”⁴ The table top of his market stall is covered with a cloth of green and brown camouflage netting, which rises up to the sides of his stall. On top of the netting are long solid slabs of different handcrafted soaps, marbled variously blue, pink, yellow and brown. These sit behind a row of brown and blue glass pots containing creams and an array of loosely arranged bottles: small ones containing essential oils and large ones containing homemade tonics. Between them is an aerosol full of luck: “Gamblers Spray.” Most of these, the aerosol excluded, Dickson makes himself in a nearby workshop. Behind the stall is a laminated black and gold poster of Barack Obama and “America’s First Family”, beneath which are bowls of fresh Jamaican ‘scotch bonnet’ peppers and African naga peppers, two small bowls of Ghanaian mangos, sugar cane and three fresh coconuts. To the sides of his stall, an assortment of Africana – carved wooden statues and, folded and wrapped in cellophane, a pile of gold, green, red and black starred Ghanaian flags. Almost every day of the year (apart from the wet ones, the really hot ones, and Wednesdays when he manufactures his goods), Dickson sells his produce, primarily the handcrafted soaps, to a notably broad cross-section of the market’s patrons.

3 For details on ‘traditional’ pronunciation of cockney consonants see: John Christopher Wells, *Accents of English: The British Isles Volume II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 313-317

4 With regards to his theological affiliation Dickson remarks, “I was a Christian. Seventh Day Adventist. And to be a Rasta I don’t see no difference. The difference is that you can make yourself different but not the law of the church or the society.”

At a casual glance Dickson and his stall can be seen as authentic Africana, inherited handicrafts transplanted from Africa and reassembled in London. This is, without a doubt, an impression that Dickson attempts to impart: When I first met him and asked him where he got his products from he stated, curtly, “Africa” before returning to his work at the stall.

Accordingly, if we take his own initial explanation at face value, Dickson's existence in the market *could* be interpreted as the importing of ‘essential’ essences into east London. This view of the market stall would certainly be congruent with an interpretation of globalisation as a process wherein hermetic cultures are seemingly transplanted, reconstituted, and made amenable to a “boutique multiculturalism.”⁵

Yet on top of the seemingly linear Ghana-London link, there is a vast, non linear meshwork of locations, practices, bodies and sensations that can be traced both through the sensoria of the soap stand, and through the sensibilities through which it is made sense of. To bring into relief this meshwork of locations, practices, bodies and sensations, I will first detail some key points in Dickson’s biography. This, incidentally, is by no means a complete biography, but one that relates specifically to the texture and aroma of the soaps and lotions that he crafts and sells, the production of which is an analogue of the complex production of identity and social formation in east London.

(Sort of) true to his initial word, Dickson’s first contact with handmade soaps was as a small child at the feet of his grandmother and mother in Ghana:

“You see this soap?”

⁵ Stanley Eugene Fish, *The Trouble with Principle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 56.

Dickson reaches underneath his stall and produces, from inside a worn brown piece of paper, a large rough white ball. It is about the size of grapefruit but crumbly and unevenly textured. It does not, to me, look like soap.

“...This is soap.”

“That’s soap?”

“Yes. This type of soap is what my granma an’ mother make. She makes different types of soap but this is where these come from...They always mixing them. Water plus palm oil and plantain leafs and stuff. They always mixing them. An’s using them on me. Heh. D’ya get me? So I know what she use.”

The ‘base’ of the soap which Dickson mixes and blends himself is indeed very much the same as that used by his grandmother and mother in Ghana. Like women across West Africa, the maternal side of Dickson’s family had their own locally ‘inherited’ recipe for blending ‘black soap’ or *alata simena* as it is known locally. The soap balls that Dickson manufactures alongside his more rectangular blocks, are frequently recognised as ‘authentic’ by female West African users of the market who often fondle, although rarely buy, the large waxy lumps. In this sense Dickson’s production of the soaps does *appear* to result from the transplantation of sensoria and practices, from Africa into London. Yet at this point it is important to point out that, as a young man growing up within a patriarchal culture, Dickson made little effort to consciously inherit the highly gendered sensory affinities that were being passed along the matriarchal side of West African families.

“Do you know what I mean? Making soap. It was not my thing. I just watch them. It’s not like my ideal. If it was my ideal I would learn it straight away. I would have studied straight away.”

It was not until moving to London from Ghana and a prolonged stint fulfilling the allotted roles of West African migrants (as under valorised feminised labour), that soap entered the

economic life of Dickson. It was after a particularly long stint as a cleaner that a friend came to him and said,

“They making soaps and they’s looking for somebody. Who knows how to be making soap?”

The opportunity to make something certainly represented something more appealing than cleaning. More importantly however, the word “soap” had something vaguely familiar about it — a strange quality that rekindled dormant memories contracted into his body as a child; a scent, a texture and a set of actions and practices.

“And so I was like. ‘Oh. I know how to make soap!’”

The important moment here, it must be said, is not the moment where Dickson *says* to himself “Oh. I know how to make soap!” Rather it is the strange familiarity he felt in his nose, his hands, the ignition of an old memory deposited deep within his bones that lead him to say to himself “Oh. I know how to make soap!” The difference is small but important, as it is the difference between actions based on discursive reasoning, and action based on the sensuous experience.

Returning to the biography; at the turn of the millennium Dickson took up the soap making job and worked for a company based in South London making what turned out to be a range of synthetic cleaning products. While this job filled an economic need, he had not found any thing that satisfied the hunger for the scent and texture that the initial mention of ‘soap’ had awakened. In this craving for a lost smell and texture, Dickson started to ‘sense’ a potential niche in the market.

“ I have an education for how to making soaps. How to making cream and stuff. But it was a different way to making them kind of products. After a while it was like... ‘Oh no! I’m making soap, an’ I know how to make soap better’ So then I was like “‘Why don’t you..... Use your own ideas from back home, an’ make soap?’”

The experience of watching his mother and grandmother moulding soap out of ashen plantain leaves left him with vague olfactory and tactile memories. However, having made little effort to inherit the practice, Dickson lacked the requisite corporeal ‘experience’ with which to make the soaps himself. Accordingly, he felt that some formal and practical training was required before he could set up his own business. Not long after he enrolled in a nearby college:

.. Why not study them much more to improve my idea. So I just find herbal medicine courses”

“Where?”

“Islington College. So they give me more ideas like mixing things, herbals, to the product. They tell me about new things.”

“New ingredients?”

“Yes, and I pick things up and stuff. But then other things; I’m like, ‘That is true because my mum and family use it.’ So some of the things she use, they was like ‘look at this’ and I was like, well, she used it too, so it’s good.”

At the college, Dickson alongside a class of others, underwent a carefully designed programme of sensory training, a soft version of the processes described by Bruno Latour in his account of the training of perfumers.⁶ He learnt about various compounds and their aromatic differences as well as the tactile and medicinal properties of a range of substances and their combinations. Through the repetitious process of learning, he acquired a new type of nose

6 Bruno Latour, “How to Talk About the Body? the Normative Dimension of Science Studies,” *Body & Society* 10, no. 2 (2004): 205.

and a new type of hand, able to discern the distinctions between a range of complex compounds as well as the bodily states aroused by them. At some points these new ways of sensing synchronised with old ones – “That is true because my mum and stuff use it” – and at other moments, they contradicted the pre-existent sensory intuitions.

Accordingly, to the Ghanaian base of his soap Dickson added deviations from his family’s recipes. While Dickson continued to source various products and influences from Africa he also sourced olive oils, tea tree and lavender extracts from across Europe and Asia, and combined them with extracts and oils from “all over the place.” To each blend Dickson contributes a montage of accumulated ingredients, influences and practices, all of which he stirs into large vats before moulding into rectangular blocks. The end result is a highly popular, green, pink, white, beige or brown marbled soap bar dispensed for cleansing and the treatment of “eczema, stretch marks, chill skins, dry skins, psoriasis. You know? Terrible skin disorders.”

One moment at the stall, the customer is a fidgety old Caribbean man demanding that the “Rastaman,” sort him out with a “remedy fi’ me itchy balls,”⁷ while behind him a Polish mother waits to buy a block of camomile soap for her sleepless child. She arrives simultaneously to a small 60 year old Rastafarian, peering from beneath a sagging tammy. He waits for her to move aside before asking for a small blue tub of cream, and a stick of sugar cane. The latter, Dickson deftly prepares with a machete before handing it over with a paper towel. Between these customers, Dickson deals with pairs of older West African women who pass rough balls of unprocessed soap between them, sniffing and rubbing them, turning them

⁷ To which Dickson replied, “Try this, for three days. It should ease it. If not, see your doctor. D’you get me?”

over and asking questions before leaving, often buying nothing. Many more passers-by just stop to say hello, surveying any new items on the table.

Despite the abundant Africana surrounding Dickson's stall, and his initial 'statement of origin', the soapy biography and the exchanges that take place around destabilise the perception of Ridley Road as the location of foreign 'essences' and sensibilities, wholly transplanted into new contexts. Rather, the olfactory marbling of the soap is indicative of the layered, transnational sensibility that its creator embodies. And Dickson is in many respects is an analog for the rest of the market: Far from the centre of a multicultural in crisis – communities 'sleep walking into segregation' – the sensoria shrouding Dickson's stall are one of many sites of polyvalent convergence for a remarkably diverse group. Beyond that they are at the very core of a multicultural, cross cut with global currents, yet continually blended in a distinctly local manner.⁸

Colonialism and the Flavour of Multiculture

Of course, for critics of hybridity, this translation of Dickson's story, and the handcrafted bars of soap that emerge out of it, are exemplarily metaphors for the weaknesses of hybridity discourse. That is, ultimately, through tracing hybrid heritages the account must eventually fall back on to 'essential, indivisible wholes' out of which the hybrid is made, thus refortifying senses of hermetic ethnicity, forestalling meaningful intercultural dialogues and bolstering racist forms of distinction. Certainly, simply reading the ingredients list on any one of Dickson's cross-cultural tinctures would seem to exemplify hybridity's ultimate dependence on

⁸ Trevor Phillips, "Britain 'sleepwalking into segregation'" *The Guardian*, September 19, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/sep/19/race.socialexclusion>.

‘essences.’⁹ However, in response to such criticisms, it must also be recognised that the same attention to hybrid provenance applied to the final composite, is also applicable to the individual ingredients, as well as a taste for them, each of which also has its own transcultural story. Take for instance the floral notes of nutmeg and clove and the warm scent of cinnamon in one particularly fragrant block of green marbled ‘Healing Soap.’ These of course are all spices whose migration from south Indian cuisine into Europe, started with excessive exoticisation on the palates of Europeans.¹⁰ At the same time, however, as being carried on the colonial conveyor belts longitudinally from the ‘exotic’ tropics to temperate zones, the same spices, and a taste for them, took horizontal journeys along with slaves and indentured labourers, around the Earth’s tropical girdle. Importantly, here, rather than necessarily being exoticised, or reviled, they were often integrated into ‘authentic’ local culinary practices, with erstwhile south Asian spices being integral to much pan-American cuisine. The same is true for many of the markets most abundant groceries, chilli peppers and mangoes for instance, the taste *of* and a taste *for* neither having a history that is isolable to one location or culture. Chillies, like their cousins, tomatoes and potatoes, were, for example, uprooted from the lower slopes of the Andes, transported through Europe and planted into the tropical soil of India and South East Asia, where, cultivated into new varieties, they became central to a wide array of ‘authentic Asian cuisines’. Uprooted, the perfumed flesh of mango was folded, with blood and sweat, into local cultures all along the return leg from Asia, through Africa and over the Atlantic to the Caribbean where its ever diversifying cultivars becoming icons of distinct local cultures.

9 Kaja Eklund Friedman and Jonathan Friedman, *Modernities, Class, and the Contradictions of Globalization: The Anthropology of Global Systems* (AltaMira Press, 2008), 236.

10 Harold J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange* (New Jersey: Yale University Press, 2007).
Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise* (London: Vintage Books, 1993).

As well as exemplifying the extent to which nearly all ‘essences’ at the market, as well as tastes for them, emerge out of cultural cross-roads, the overlapping food-ways also give clues as to the factors sustaining the remarkable everyday multiculturalism of Ridley Road. As a result of the global circulation of flavours that sustained early capitalism, there are also numerous gustatory bridges between the culinary cultures entangled in such Imperialistic ventures. It is not then, strange to suggest that where bodies followed sticky drupes, berries and spices northward, from across the tropics into ‘post-colonial’ Europe, the converging tastes bequeathed by Imperial circuitry might prefigure transcultural trade – and even meaningful friendships. Certainly this seems to be the case with Ridley Road Market. Consider for instance, Ali, the Pakistani born trader mentioned at the very start of chapter one, became a specialist in Afro-Caribbean and West African groceries and cuisine, by way of first having opened a stall selling fruits, fish and spice mixes to South Asians at Ridley Road. Judging by the convivial exchanges that take place around his stall, or the old friends that meet while looking over the fruits of a neighbouring stall, partial overlap in gustatory sensibility is certainly one of the many forms of affinity around which the market’s diverse community convenes.

However, as mentioned and demonstrated in the previous chapter, there are plenty of instances where the olfactory or gustatory dialogues do not result in their incorporation into a new culture, or sense of self. Rather, as often happens, they are ‘sensed’ as threats, and either reviled, or relegated to consumable exotica as a result. Considering this, it seems unlikely that the community sustained through the everyday life of the market, and reflected in its olfactory topography, is simply be the result of mere synergies between gustatory repertoires. What, then, are the intervening variables, the mortar that fortifies the sedimented everyday multiculturalism of such spaces?

Entrepreneurialism, Multiculture and the Senses

As Dick Hobbs argues in his ethnography of entrepreneurs in the 1980s, socio-economic context, and the endurance of class in particular, are integral to the types of transcultural interaction that occurs in location such as east London.

[A]s an area of first settlements for generations of migrants, The East End's isolation and reliance upon the whims of the market-place take over from more traditional social forces, such as religion and family, and by absorbing those characteristics appropriate to the market, a culture has been created that is a hybrid of various ethnic groups, yet still retains an essential identity that is not Jewish, Irish, West Indian, or Asian but is that of the East End."¹¹

Twenty years on, the lives and relationships of 'East Enders' remain structured by their unfolding within a culturally diverse community living in a historically poor neighbourhood; geographically adjacent to, but excluded from the various forms of capital circulating The City. Accordingly, with limited resources at their disposal, and removed from familiar ties as well as the expectations and resources of community, Ridley Road Market's traders and patrons develop transcultural relationships, partly out of raw necessity.

Spending just a day watching an aforementioned stall holder, Ali, negotiating the sale of salt cod to Nigerians, star anise to middle-class white Britons, bags of turmeric to a Pakistani uncle, and bags of locally blended spice mix to a black British woman – all to make what is barely a living wage – reveals the remarkable extent to which the socio-economic context demands that the market's traders, as well as its users, develop varying degrees of literacy in one another's life worlds. Of course, this literacy involves varying degrees of linguistic fluency,

¹¹ Dick Hobbs, *Doing the Business* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 140.

as well as literacy in the customs that regulate trading (ways of bartering, for instance). Most important to traders at Ridley Road Market, and as Ali exemplifies, is a degree of sensory empathy with potential customers, and a corporeal familiarity with the worlds they inhabit.¹² Similarly, it was Dickson's precarious work cleaning rooms, pressing cloth and mixing chemicals, and the alienation he suggests it entailed, that led him to a formal education in the smells and textures of his customer's life worlds. Both traders display a keen sense of multicultural, sensory empathy, and both can testify to the extent to which, far from being their "ideal", this sensitivity was necessitated by the political economy of the city. "Cross border knowledge" is, in this instance and as Jan Nederveen Pieterse argues, also "survival knowledge."¹³

As well as necessitating that its residents develop transnational sensitivities to survive, the historically informed socio-economic context of the East End also determines the general needs of the market's users, and thus structures the economic activity in which the market's traders engage. The socio-economic context in which the market is embedded is, for instance, entirely relatable to the market's abundance of low price greengrocers, butchers, cafes, fast food stalls and vendors of cheap pharmaceutical and electrical goods. In contrast a neighbouring market's range of artisan breads, pheasant and vintage clothing boutiques, most of Ridley Road Market's stalls are involved in meeting the everyday needs of the markets diverse users.

12 Some traders at the market display an incredibly wide range of skills and tactics when negotiating the price of their products with customers. There is also an incredibly wide knowledge of other cultural practices, for instance religious holidays and feasting rituals. One remarkable example is a long, detailed and highly informative overheard discussion between a white working-class trader, and one of his customers about the Sikh practice of avoiding 'Kutha' (kosher or halal) meat.

13 Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 102.

Again the necessity of not just certain flavours, but certain types of socio-economic activity, is in evidence around Dickson's stall, which is as much a destination of necessity, as it is a source of luxuries for its patrons. Like green-grocers, fishmongers, and fast food stalls, the historically informed economic context of the market seems to give lay practitioners of medicine, considerable viability. In Mary Bendetta's 1938 account of Ridley Road for instance, she describes an old Jewish woman who "sells medicines which she brews herself over the kitchen fire." Not unlike Dickson's products which are sold on nearly the same spot, "each mixture is attended by the name of some illness..."¹⁴ Moreover, like Dickson's stall, the old medicine woman might have also required a degree of cross cultural literacy. Although by all accounts, the vast majority of stalls at the time belonged to Jewish traders, the life of the market comprised of interactions between a local Jewish, Italian and Irish customer base. Such historical analogues are not insignificant: Through them the interactions between Dickson and his customers, that of Ali and his diverse customer base, as well as the multicultural of the market as a whole, look less like 'additions' of 'consumable ethnicity' precipitated by new patterns of global migration, than the reiteration of old urban types, in part necessitated by the poverty ingrained in the city's east.

Tastes of Necessity?

Like Dickson's lay-medicine and soap stall, the existence, and flavour, of the market's numerous cross-cultural 'fast food' stalls are also upheld by the imperatives of existence in a poor, yet historically multicultural pocket of London. That is, they are affordable, bear cross-cultural influence, and have multicultural appeal. The market's new 'halal hotdog' vendor is,

¹⁴ Mary Bendetta, *The Street Markets of London* (London: Blom, 1972) 137-140

When I pointed out this continuity to Dickson, he remarked that it probably was true, and that he had once met, at the market, a relative of the old woman who ran a stall "just like" his.

for instance, highly instructive in this sense. This authors' favoured example, however, and that which will be dissected below, is vended from a shop mentioned early on in the aromatic inventory with which the chapter opened: Recall the warm doughy smell that draws the nose



“Mr Bagel’s”, Ridley Road Market, March 2010, author’s photograph

in

towards “Mr Bagel, Rice and Spice, (We Do Indian & Caribbean Food).”

Remarkably, given the general absence of Jewish business and customers in the market today, the bagel bakery, which has endured since the market opened remains a popular destination for many of the market’s shoppers and traders.¹⁵ Although it continues to serve chopped fish, salmon and cream cheese sandwiches, by far the most popular item today, and that which even draws some people to the market, is the ‘jerk chicken bagel’. Let us ruminate, for a moment longer, on this dense, chewy, slightly sweet parcel of starch, softened with the juices from lightly spiced meat. Not getting too distracted by rumbling bellies, consider what this

¹⁵ Although the business has not been in Jewish hands for several decades now, it was formerly Harris Cohen’s ‘Ridley Bagel Bakery’. For an inventory of old businesses at the market see: Michael Shapiro, Aumie Shapiro, and Springboard (Project), *Jewish Londoners* (Springboard Education Trust, 1993), 20-23

sandwich might tell us about the relationship between the senses, the political economy of the city, and multicultural social formation in London.

From the point of view of the utilitarian economist, the doughy residues of the old working-class Jewish in the market, (the bagel) is exemplary of what Pierre Bourdieu would call, a “taste of necessity.”¹⁶ So too is the soft, slightly lardy spiced chicken, a filling and cheap analogue of the slow-smoked dish first prepared in Jamaica’s Portland parish, and popularised in London in the late twentieth century.¹⁷ Both components of the sandwich represent that which is “simultaneously most ‘filling’ and most economical, reproducing labour power at the lowest cost.”¹⁸ What is particularly interesting about the bagel is the seeming interchangeability of ‘tastes of necessity’: The doughy bagel neatly substituting the starchy



Jerk Chicken Bagel, Ridley Road Market, July 2008, author's photograph

30 That which is “simultaneously most ‘filling’ and most economical, reproducing labour power at the lowest cost.” See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1984), 177.

17 Carole Boyce Davies, *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 591.

18 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1984), 177.

'hard food' of Caribbean cuisines, and the chicken replacing the bagel's generic filling, lightly peppered and salted beef.¹⁹

Although efforts have been made, it has been hard to pin down who it was that first combined elements from these discrete diasporic cuisines. Perhaps more important to recognise, however, is less one baker's 'inventive' substitution of analogous calories, flavours and textures, than the extent to which the recipe was written, first and foremost, by the history of industrialising Europe and its interactions with the rest of the world: Neither the flavours of the jerk chicken bagel, the aromas of Dickson's lay medicine stall, nor the general ambience of the market, are 'fusion tastes' of happenstance, resulting from the random collision of complimentary tastes. Rather they are recipes structured by the necessity of a cheap and expendable migrant workforce, by the interchangeability of labour in the city, and seasoned by the histories of British colonialism, slavery and of European anti-semitism, that led particular groups to coagulate at the market on the peripheries of the city.

Tactical Tastes

Certainly socio-economic space in which specific materialities of the market collide are important factors shaping of the smudging the cultural boundaries between the market's users, necessitating the substitution of necessity's tastes, and the formation of intercultural dialogues. However, whipping off the "blanket" of "socio-economic rationality" that Michel deCerteau suggests Bourdieuians throw over all acts of cultural production,²⁰ it also serves to consider that the bagel emerges not simply out of the similar positioning of two cultures within the

¹⁹Jamaican cuisine is characterised by an abundance of 'hard food,' defined as starchy products such as yams, potatoes, bananas and cassava, as well as dumplings (boiled or fried) and pasta.

²⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 59 .

political economy of the city. Rather, it emerges out of an informal recognition of analogies between two experiences of modernity, and is a response to these histories. More explicitly the bagel, and the multiculturalism of which it is part, is a form of tactical retort to the racialising strategies foregrounded in the history of modernity.

As discussed above, the two distinct cultural residues present in the jerk chicken bagel are the result of the consecutive homemaking efforts of Jewish and Caribbean migrants into the East End. As well as both having constituted a core of labouring London, as Paul Gilroy argues, both groups have analogous experience of modernity's matrices of knowledge and power. That is, both have been subject to efforts that sought to identify and name distinctly bounded ethnicities in the production of national identities and cultures, and to exorcise alien or hybridising elements: Black bodies were subjected to the 'scientific gaze' of American raciology, and Jews to European eugenics.²¹ As I argue below, it is the overlapping experiences of categorisation and essentialisation, or rather, the conjoined, tactical, de-essentialising responses to these experiences, that really holds the sandwich together, and which quietly binds the everyday multiculturalism of the market.

While the users of Ridley Road Market may or may not have been directly subjected to the modern terrors of holocaust, ethnocide and colonial exploitation, as the previous chapters demonstrated, the ripples of all of these have certainly lapped at the market over last century. First it was the smells and flavours of the predominantly Jewish market that were perceived as vectors of a simultaneously racial and political threat. Not half a century later, it was the flavours, aromas and sounds of Black and Asian London, the gut reactions to which were interpreted as the identification of a more explicitly cultural and social threat. Gilroy's attempt

²¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (London: Verso, 1999), 206-202.

to draw connections between Jewish and Black experiences of modernity constitutes part of a wider project that seeks to strategically respond to the essentialising logic of racism by drawing connections between the cultural production that affirms the ubiquity of hybridity. Although maybe not explicitly framed by its bakers or consumers as such, the jerk chicken bagel might in fact be a manifestation of a more everyday, implicit recognition of analogous experiences of modernity, and constitute an attempt to respond to them with an explicitly hybrid culture that disturbs the logic of race and racism. Whether or not it has ever been deliberately conceived of as such, the bagel is indicative of a local culture developed in the shadow of a hegemonic sensibility's disgust and very much at home with hybridity. In this sense – conscious intentions of the baker, and discursive rationalisations of its consumers aside – the bagel, and an everyday taste for it, are corporeally conceived and tactical responses to attempts to essentialise and racialise everywhere. From this perspective, the shopping lists of Ridley Road Market's users, and many of the meals that they cook up at home, might also constitute quiet, everyday acts of solidarity and resistance against the essentialising sensibilities that inform the revulsion directed at the market.

The layers of flavour in the bagel, like the briefly mentioned halal hot dog, or the ever shifting combinations of vegetables and fruits, sitting side by side (without polythene prophylactics), are certainly testament to the interchangeability of bodies within the city's 'poorer' socio-economic strata, and the transnational histories of power that provide this labour. As evidenced through the olfactory inventory of the market, each new wave of migrants that passed through labouring east London, effectively sedimented the sensoria and sensibilities of its homemaking efforts on top of those deposited by the last. Partly through the necessity that its residents develop a familiarity with one another, this resulted in the production of the peculiar sensibilities and sensoria of a distinctly local, yet globally inflected, culture. However,

it is also the case that the everyday multicultural of the street arises out of a social space that, because of its identification and treatment as a container of expendable otherness, deliberately leaves itself open-ended. The essence of local culture then, is not that of an imported African culture, nor of the old Jewish market, but rather a multicultural conspicuously amenable to being re-mixed, re-jigged, and re-shuffled, and an ability to accommodate to new flavours or aromas without any necessary change to the 'essentially mixed' character.

Global Identities and Local Culture

In foregrounding the market's essentially mixed aromatic topography, and the hybridised sensibilities it reflects, I am in no way trying to suggest that the users of the market and their tastes are devoid of relation to a particular 'originary' place or culture. Nor should this account of a marbled social space be read as assuming that all experiences of dislocating and essentialising modernity can be considered the same. Although, as Jan Nederveen Pieterse argues, self and communal identification with hybridity are commonplace all over the world – "[c]reolization in the Caribbean, mestizaje in Latin America and fusion in Asia" – few of the users of the market that I spoke to explicitly identified with such labels.²² Most, in fact took some pride in what they felt to be the sensory repertoires of a hermetic cultural heritage of their own. Consider for instance, Dickson's proud proclamation that his products came from "Africa." Yet, as Pieterse also argues, self-identification with various forms of hybridity, is not a necessary condition of a hybridised culture. As the next chapter's consideration of taste for 'indigenous local cuisine' in east London argues further, while each individual might consciously associate their tastes with a particular cultural heritage, tracing the provenance of the

²² Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Hybridity, So What?: The Anti-Hybridity Backlash and the Riddles of Recognition," *Theory Culture Society* 18, no. 2 (June 1, 2001): 219-245.

sensoria and sensibilities that they inhabit, consistently reveals the ‘route’s’ conducted through the body that cut across and connect the ‘roots’ that each consciously affixes to their aesthetic sensibility.

Nor should the argument above be taken to suggest that the consequences of increasing global flows in sensoria and sensibilities necessarily ends in a torrential flow of generic, ‘browned out’ global culture, in which local culture simply drowns. As the sensuous spatial portrait sketched here makes plain, the type of multiculturalism that emerges at Ridley Road is also a very local culture, peculiar to the cross-roads that meet at Dalston Junction, distinct from the corporate global cosmopolitanism of the nearby city, yet with universal relevance in terms of its amenability to the incorporation of new flavours and essences.

In fact it is this, the peculiarity of the globally-inflected yet distinctly local culture that culminates around Dalston Junction, revealed by the olfactory inventory, that makes the strongest case for turning the nose towards urban culture in a globalised age. Of all sense organs the nose is the most sensitive, the only one able to detect the slightest atomic difference in a molecule, and the slightest molecular difference in a compound or mixture. Such a sensitivity has very real consequences for the understanding of urban space. It is of course a common complaint of conservative political philosophers on both the left and right – often peering at contemporary inner cities from the outside – that globalisation is a metastasising force, emanating from central control points, converting the heterogeneity of the planet into an undifferentiated mass. In many respects, such theorists can be forgiven as victims of the representational practices, in particular, the ‘ways of seeing’ that they have been bequeathed by an ocular-centric epoch of scientific thought. Indeed there are in fact many locations, both across London and across other global conurbations. that *look* much like Ridley Road: signs painted with the same palette of attention-grabbing colours, thighs clad in ubiquitous faded

indigo denim, torsos sweating beneath the same red nylon football shirts with household names emblazoned on the back, wrists clattering with beaded bracelets of black, gold and green, and dilapidated steel shutters coated with the same shade of rust. The isomorphism between the most conspicuously ‘multicultural’ parts of Paris, London, New York, Oslo and Lagos is even more striking when viewed from the ‘angels’ eye view’ favoured by macro theorists of urban space. However, turning the nose towards urban space reveals a different portrait of ‘globalised space.’ Attention given over to the complex compounds entering the nose and exhaled across the palate, reveals the unique assemblage of sensoria and sensibility that make up the flavour of a local culture. Not only, then, does turning the nose towards urban space reveal the remarkable combination of global influences pouring into a given locale: The nose, with its sensitivity to the slightest atomic difference, reveals the endurance and evolution of the countless locally distinct cultures that arise out of the confluence of particular people and things over a socially, historically, geographically, geologically and historically unique terrain.

Loosing Touch with Vision

Above I have foregrounded the aromas and flavours of the market and argued for their role in sustaining a conspicuously multicultural meshwork, by way of the noses and taste-buds of its patrons. Converging olfactory and gustatory sensibilities are doubtlessly implicated in the uniquely local everyday multiculturalism of the market. Before concluding this chapter, however, I would like to offer one of the stall holders’ accounts of the local multiculturalism and in particular the transcultural appeal of his products, as it is expressed through a sensory register very important to the market, yet hitherto undiscussed in this thesis.

Interestingly Dickson puts the broad appeal of his products not down to combinations of aromas and essences that he carefully blends, nor to the multiplicity of interwoven cultures and biographies within which the aromas register. Rather he attributes the apparent universal popularity of his products to the tactile work that they do: to the fact that they work on skin, and on the hands, at a level of sensory experience where distinction and discrimination is seemingly impossible. Holding up his left arm and rubbing it with his right hand, he informs me that, “it’s not white skin with white remedies or black skin with black remedies... it’s all the same remedy... it’s just skin.” Without a doubt, there is real insight in this observation.

Moreover, the importance of indiscriminate ‘touch’ is relevant, not just to the polyvalence of Dickson’s soaps, but to the market in general, where the constricted and crowded space limits the primacy of vision, and necessitates haptic negotiation of space in ways that other urban spaces do not. As I want to argue below, reiterating earlier arguments, the indiscriminate touch that regulates collisions, greetings and exchanges in the market, is not, a universal characteristic of touch. Rather and the experience of epidermal contact, blind to colour, is a historically and culturally specific achievement.

As Mark M. Smith illustrates in his multisensory history of antebellum race making, throughout much of eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century Europe and America, the optical tonality of skin created a shadow over its tactile experience.²³ Therein the white persons’ experience of touching black skin was synaesthetic – accented by vision – and therefore tainted by racism, “a discourse of power that” as Bull and Back argue, “thinks,” first and foremost “with its eyes.”²⁴ In many respects, the experience of touch, inflected by discriminatory ‘ways of seeing’, was experienced as a threat to the boundary of the white

23 Mark M. Smith. *How Race is Made* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2006), 42.

24 Michael Bull and Les Back, *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 14.

body, and through the body, to the ‘white culture’ of which it was part. Despite the relatively undifferentiated texture of epidermises noted by Dickson, touch, of skin on skin in particular, has not always transcended the distinctions of race. In the instances delineated by Smith, touch, in conjunction with vision, was a key sensory modality through which race was made and acted upon.

However, the differences between a street market in east London and the antebellum South are more than simply a couple of centuries and a few thousand miles. As discussed above, the gustatory and olfactory protocols that characterise the local culture of the market emerge out of decades of inter-cultural contact, as well as a century of subjection to harassment and racist violence. Haptic protocols are no different. The relative skin ‘colour-blindness,’ or perhaps colour numbness, that characterises the tactile experience of the market, is also a product of, and antithesis to this violence. It is not, it must be said, a manifestation of the institutional colour-blindness discussed in the previous chapter that presents itself as a shortcut to equality in the rhetoric of neo-liberal anti-racism. Rather, it is the type of colour-blindness that is the *end* result of sustained grass-roots, local, anti-racist struggle. Dickson’s succinct affirmation of a universal skin, an accurate explanation as to the widespread popularity of his products, is a particularly strong testament to the difference between the sensory structures of twenty-first-century east London, and the crude, racist “haptic protocols” of twentieth century segregation.²⁵ While racist discourse endures through many non-visual senses (see previous chapter), an attention to the discriminating power of vision has also liberated ‘the other senses’ over which the visual once held so much power. And it is through the other senses, that the social strata once defined by chromatic categories, are smudged into the everyday multiculturalism characteristic of the market and its environs.

25 Mark M. Smith, *How Race is Made* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2006), 86.

Conclusion

In the previous two chapters I attempted to explore the reproduction and fortification of social strata through the multisensory experience of urban environments. I did this primarily through an analysis of squeamish and disgusted encounters with specific flavours and aromas. Although rationalised as objective or ‘natural’ responses, these interpretations of the street’s multisensory ambience were revealed as regulating the boundaries of particular ‘cultures’ and spatialising social distinctions.

Above I have attempted to present the other side of what Les Back has referred to as the metropolitan paradox as it relates to multisensory experience. That is, alongside being a contributing factor in the reification of race and class, the multisensory experience of urban space within particular contexts facilitates smudges between what would elsewhere be perceived as separate cultural worlds. Ridley Road Market, and the surrounding area of Dalston Junction, are one of those contexts:

As Sophie Watson argues in her account of ‘street markets as a space of social interaction,’ markets such as Ridley Road are incredibly social spaces hosting interactions that range from...

“a very minimal connection, such as a greeting between acquaintances or between shoppers and traders, to extended conversations between those who have met up in the market, or extended interactions between stallholders and the customers they serve...”

Importantly, at Ridley Road, these are interactions that often take place across “different... demographic and ethnic/racial groups.”²⁶

Such interaction do not, however, simply happen. Rather, the olfactory inventories, and multisensory attention that I develop throughout this chapter, reveal the work done by noses, taste-buds and fingers in spaces such as the market, to sustain the everyday multicultural it typifies. What makes the sensibilities of the market and its users particularly notable, and sustains their peculiar multicultural, is the extent to which, rather than being met with a squirm, the apparently un-homely aroma or flavour is characteristically accommodated within the life of the market.

However, simply presenting the olfactory inventory, and stating the fact of the intermingling cultures in the space of the market, is not sufficient to explain the peculiar interaction across demographic groups that takes place, through the senses, within that space. As discussed in the previous chapter, there are a number of metropolitan contexts wherein different sensory worlds meet, yet fail to blend in and out of one and other, or when they do, are experienced as a threat to a particular identity. As the previous chapters argued, the social nature of these squeamish responses are revealed when situated within a historical context, exposing the role of the senses in the reproduction of capital and power. Like the squeamish sensibilities behind the fortification of social strata, the flavours and sensibilities that sustain the multicultural of east London also have to be situated within a historical, cultural and economic context.

Tracing the history of the locale sedimented in the sensuous topography of the market, I have situated the open-ended sensibilities of the multicultural market’s users in a number of

²⁶ Sophie Watson and David Studdert, *Markets as Sites for Social Interaction: Spaces of Diversity* (London: The Policy Press, 2006), 14.

contexts. First, the market and the peculiar local culture of which it is part must be understood as emerging out of a historically poor part of London. Located in the city's east, over which the affluent of the west used to flow, the area has, for centuries now, historically provided a home to the hard labour out of which the city is sustained. Historically close to the erstwhile 'port city's' opening to the sea, the environs of the market have also been the first port of call for dislocated refugees and economic migrants arriving in London. Although no longer a port city, the port's legacy ensures it remains an important destination for the world's poorer migrants. In this sense, the culture of the market, and its characteristic amenability to difference, needs to be understood as simultaneously prefigured by poverty, and the dislocating experiences of modernity that lead individuals to east London.

The novel sensory synchronies and syntheses of the market, and the multiculturalism that they underpin, partly result then from the convergence of modernity's dislocating tendencies, and the home-making efforts of migrants that come with them to the city's impoverished east. Or rather they result from the necessity of intercultural exchange experienced as a result of the confined space allotted to dislocated vagabonds (as opposed to globally mobile tourists), within the political economy of the city.²⁷ As the interchangeability of labour manifest in the super-fuel 'jerk chicken bagel' attests to, the socio-economic history of, and conjunction of migratory paths at the market provides much of the building material, and ingredients for, multicultural social formation in east London.

The transcultural relationships that develop at the market however, are also a great deal more than the sum of converging bodies within the constraints of the historically informed local

²⁷ This use of the figures of the vagabond and tourist follows Zigmunt Bauman's typology of the type of mobile individual precipitated by modernity. For more on this distinction see the following chapter, and: Zigmunt Bauman, *Globalization and its Discontents* (Columbia University Press, 1998), 77.

poverty. Rather they can also be understood as exceeding these factors, and as a tactic practised at the everyday level of body, if not consciously conceived, against attempts to enact the essentialisation and hierarchisation of humanity. That is, the commingling essences of the market are exemplarily manifestations of an everyday resistance against essentialism and racial violence that, at both the global and local levels, aims to evaluate human existence according to the sensoria that surround each body.

Yet while the everyday multiculturalism associated with the social formations of Dalston and Ridley Road Market makes everyday life habitable and erodes the legitimacy of the ethno-social lines along which asymmetries of power and capital are reproduced, the stratifying squirms described in the previous chapter still have considerable power. Moreover, the conspicuously hybridised social formations of Ridley Road, and the threat to essentialist logic and its concomitant hierarchies that they pose, ensure it remains the target of this power. Accordingly, while racist violence and institutionalised social exclusion within Dalston and Ridley Road Market have lessened significantly over the last two decades, a heavily racialised form of socio-economic stratification endures, and remains a strong correlate of such astonishingly transcultural spaces.

Through arguing all of the above, this chapter has sought to make plain that the everyday multisensory ambience of urban space, partially captured in the opening olfactory inventory and what followed, is not just an incidental background against which urban social formation takes place. Nor is it simply 'reflective' of a peculiarly local formation. Rather, it is an integral medium through which life worlds are made habitable, and through which local culture is made – a local culture characterised by the destabilisation of exclusivist identity and the formation of transnational relation.

There are risks in presenting the social forms of the conspicuously trans-cultural life of Ridley Road Market as emblematic of everyday multiculturalism, as I have above. The risk is in exceptionalising and fetishising 'exotic' hybridity, where those typically construed as 'ethnic' and 'other' co-exist. This simultaneously runs the risk of fuelling the crude binaries that in some ways structure the squeamish sensibilities in the previous chapter. Perhaps most importantly, it runs the risk of overlooking the transcultural inflections of culture where it appears to be less conspicuously global, and ignoring the extent to which hybridised forms of culture also produce forms of local identity, which are mistakenly experienced as essential.

Accordingly, heeding cautions against presenting only modern diasporas and communities of recent migrants as living culturally hybridised lives, the following chapter shifts the focus on multiple global spanning trajectories manifest in a given flavour away from anything so explicitly creolised as a jerk chicken bagel, it takes the analysis back to an *apparent* bastion of white working class Britishness. That is, it explores the transcultural connections forged through Tubby Isaac's jellied eel stand.

Strangers in a Port City: Decoding Local Taste

So far, over the last three empirical chapters, I have sought to elaborate on the relationship between the multisensory experience of urban space and social formation in east London. Chapters three and four looked at the reproduction and spatialisation of various historically-informed modes of social stratification through the barely conscious attribution of meaning to a particular smell or flavour. The previous chapter, however, looked more closely at the relationships between specific sensoria, sensibilities and processes of de-stratification within urban space. More precisely, it turned its nose towards the commingling sensoria of Ridley Road, drawing on an olfactory inventory of space to develop an account of multicultural social formation. Therein it found the foundations of everyday multiculturalism emerging out of the commingling of sensibility and sensoria within specific social and economic constraints. Finally, I argued that, although developed under significant constraints, in its conspicuously hybrid nature the multiculturalism of the inner city street-market place disturbs the narrative of identity and culture through which power is upheld.

However, the previous chapter closed on a cautionary note regarding the recalcitrance of essentialist interpretations of multicultural *milieux*. In particular, it noted the extent to which the multiculturalism peculiar to spaces such as these East End markets is still often over-coded, perhaps because of its ‘destabilising hybridity’, as being ‘essentially other’. It is the tension between the hybrid evolution of culture through the sensory experiences of an inner city, and the processes of reductive overcoding that it is subsequently subjected to, that constitutes the

focus of the following chapter.¹ However, rather than going any further to decode Ridley Road, which is overcoded as a container of alien essences, this chapter seeks to reveal the mongrel origins of the ‘essential’ national forms of identification against which spaces such as Ridley Road is cast. That is, it delves into the heterogenous origins of the ‘essential’ ‘white-working-class’ identity articulated through a taste for the traditional East End fare sold at Tubby Isaac’s seafood stand. In returning to a closer inspection of this location, the chapter argues that spaces such as Ridley Road are far from exceptional in their relationship to the production of new social formations. Through analysing the transnational history of the seafood stand and turning a close attention to the life that revolves around a taste for its fare, I want to suggest that even these sensoria and sensibilities are ultimately both the product and producers of new urban ethnicities. In this sense, the following chapter shares characteristics of the previous chapter, in deploying a multisensory, historical and biographical attention to the hybrid formation of local culture within the intermingling mess of global cultural cross-roads.

In conclusion, I want to argue that far from being an icon of an island nation, the life of the stand reveals east London – an island’s opening to the seas beyond – as historically central to the development of simultaneously global and local culture; a way of being, shaped by the accretions of strangers lapping at the isles shores.

¹ I use the term overcoding here as it used by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in order to connote the process originating in a State formation that facilitates the ‘bringing of flows under the dominance of a single flow’ and the production of subjectivity through it. For more see the following concluding chapter and: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2004), 243.

EastEnders

It is ten o'clock on a Sunday morning in early November. I approach Tubby Isaac's seafood stand from my flat, a short walk from the north east. Despite the exceptional cold, which renders most aromas inert, there is a piscine tinge to the air as I walk shuddering through the empty market stall frames that line Goulston Street, toward the seafood van. While it has since become familiar to me, walking down this street produces a strange feeling, the combination of desolation and coastal ambience creating the experience of somewhere distinct from the rest of the bustling city around it.

Arriving a little earlier than normal, I am glad to discover that Paul, the stall's owner, is already setting up for the day. I reach the stand as he spikes price labels into trays of cockles and whelks, finishing the display by scattering half lemons across it. There is already one customer at the stall. She is in her late thirties, wearing jeans and trainers and a thick anorak. Her hair is tied in a pony tail, and her breath is visible in the cold air as she exhales between mouthfuls of eel jelly, which she lifts into her mouth using a small cochineal-tinted crab stick.

"Alright," I say, lifting my chin towards Paul, and nodding at the customer.

"Oh, hello mate," Paul says, wiping his hands with a white cloth.

The woman at the stand turns very slightly towards me, eyes still fixed forward and down. "Alright darling," she says, before returning a crab stick into a bowl of jelly.

"How's it going?" I ask Paul, raising my voice above the residual weekend traffic coagulating at the junction to the south of us.

Paul raises his eyebrows and pulls a sarcastic smile.

"Brilliant. Put it this way. You're the second person that's come here all day."

"It's only ten thirty. It could pick up."

"Nah. It's been dead all week. And last week."

“Any special reason why d’you think?” I ask. This is a common exchange between Paul and myself, and the answers are familiar.

A shrug and a long pause, before he wipes the stainless steel counter.

“I don’t know mate. I just don’t know.” There’s a hint of despair in his voice. “But I guess things are just changing around here a lot aren’t they?”

“I guess so,” I reply. “I mean it is up there.” I indicate with my chin towards where I came from, and regeneration of an old fruit and veg market coming to its final stages. “But, I mean, what’s changing down here?”

“I don’t know. But it’s like up there... People like you, your lot, you love sushi and and all that... Don’t get me wrong. I do to. But none of you are coming down here...”

I nod, eyebrows raised, in concurrence.

“And this new junction,” Paul continues, “you know it used to be six lanes going that way? Cars could pull up on the main road. These two lanes now, no one stops... Eels have been going through the roof as well.... I’ve got to pass on that price rise.”

The woman, between mouthfuls of eel jelly breaks her silence. Raising her head she looks at Paul first then towards, me and remarks, “I tell you why there’s no one left round here.”

“Go on,” I say.

Paul inhales deeply through his teeth.

“All the Bengalis and Pakis getting the housing. Well, now it’s the Poles, Ukrainians, Russians. I know why it’s so quiet here.”

“It’s changed a lot hey?” I ask.

“Believe you me. Listen – I was born here. So’s my mum. I’ve been coming here, since I was two. We’re a dying breed. No one English. No one eating English food. Simple as that.”

She finishes her last mouthful, places the empty tub on the top of the counter. “See you next week,” she says to Paul.

“Yeah see yah,” he replies.

“See ya darl’,”

“Yeah alright,” I reply.

In a great number of respects, the morning’s exchange is typical of many of those I was engaged in while hanging around the seafood stand. Within it, the stall’s owner, Paul, outlines

the numerous barriers he sees between potential customers and his stand. These generally range in his account from global financial crises, to changes to the local road layout and the Labour government; none of which, he is often keen to add, he is able to do anything about.² He also often nods towards changes in local tastes that have been brought about by local demographic shifts, as do his customers. However, while Paul in this instance attributes the street's desolation to the demographic effects of local gentrification, he differs in this respect from his customers, a great many of whom see the most significant local demographic change, and the biggest impact on their 'way of life' in general, to be that of global migration. This particular customer's explanation of the isolated ambience around the stand as resulting from the 'becoming global' of the city and the dissolution of Englishness, is, however, exemplarily. Typified by reference to a kinship between the terrain of the city and its 'indigenous' inhabitants, she succinctly summarises a common story: that of her 'cradle to grave' craving for lightly salted and vinegar-soaked seafood being bequeathed by 'blood,' and that the threat posed to her 'blood' is reflected in the demise of the seafood stand.

It should not however, come as a surprise that this is the dominant narrative through which the experience of the seafood stand is framed by its patrons. Although few would go to the extremes of Arthur Kemp's dubious attempt to scientifically verify connections between contemporary 'British' culture and a prehistoric ethnicity, a similar picture is backhandedly painted across far more mainstream academic accounts of the contemporary tension between 'the local' and 'the global'.³ Panikos Panayi's culinary history of modern Britain is remarkable in a great many respects,⁴ in particular for its extensive account of the flavours added to

2 I have suggested several times that he move the stall to a pitch with more pedestrian traffic and better opportunities for car parking, but he insists that tradition keeps him to that pitch.

3 Arthur Kemp, *Four Flags: The Indigenous People of Britain DNA, History and the Right to Existence of the Native Inhabitants of the British Isles* (Nuneaton: Excaliber Press, 2010).

4 Panikos Panayi, *Spicing Up Britain: The Multicultural History of British Food* (London: Reaktion 2008).

British palates by Chinese, Italian and Indian migrants to Britain over the last century. This is a process, he argues, that moves through the homemaking efforts of migrants, to the remarkable flourishing of the ‘foreign restaurant’, to the modification of national cuisines to accommodate local palates, and the later hybridisation of national cuisines, in twenty-first century fusion cooking. In this respect, Panayi’s account partly maps on to the sensory transformations I traced in the previous chapter. Importantly however, for Panayi all of these changes can be understood against a background of previously unadulterated ‘regional cuisines’. That is, for Panayi, up to the nineteenth century – where his book starts – tastes endured within certain locales and were sustained through generations of geographically-bound communities. Panayi in fact even uses ‘jellied eels,’ as an example of a pre-global, ethnic British cuisine, a taste for which has been either displaced or “spiced up” by the arrival of modernity, and the dissolution of attachments to parochial essences. Likewise, Gill Valentine, David Bell⁵ (and a number of other theorists ‘thinking The Global’ through the palate), portray the taste of unchanging, mundane, local necessities being shoved off the plate by new global flows of affordable luxuries.

Indeed, swinging a nose around the streets near to the seafood stand seemingly qualifies claims about the ‘victoriousness of the foreign restaurant’⁶ and the multi-culturalisation of British cuisine. Within two hundred meters yards of Tubby Isaac’s, there are two Thai food stands, one kebab van, one pub selling Thai food, a falafel stall, a barbecue rib stall, a van selling Caribbean cuisine, two fried Dixie style chicken takeaways, a Brazilian cafe, a Japanese noodle bar, a sushi restaurant, a sushi trailer, and a tapas bar.

5 David Bell and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat* (London, New York: Routledge 1997), 190-206.

6 Panikos Panayi, *Spicing Up Britain: The Multicultural History of British Food* (London: Reaktion 2008), 109.

There is, then, apparently a degree of truth in the assertion that in recent years, ‘local’ cultural practices have had to compete with practices coming from elsewhere in space and time for viability within east London. Indeed, as Paul recognises, many of the people that now pass by the stand would more happily consume the prettified raw seafood in Japanese packaging than the ‘risky’ steamed molluscs sold at the seafood stand.

However, to suggest that this competition and negotiation between cultures living on the Thames is new and specific to the structures of global modernity is, as Phil Cohen writes, “to underwrite the invented tradition of Englishness itself, to accept at face value its own myths of origin and destiny.”⁷ This is no small point: As important as new global flows have been to shaping new forms of local culture in London, narratives that emphasise the international food court at the heart of global London leave the sense of taste amenable to notions of ethnic exceptionalism, and at the expense of a recognition of what Luce Girard notes as the “minuscule cross roads of histories” present in “every alimentary custom.”⁸ It is not just within the flavour of newly Anglofied national cuisines or fusion foods that these crossroads are present. Rather they are also tangible, or rather delectable in the ‘national,’ ‘authentic’ and ‘ethnic’ cuisines against which the ‘global’ is cast.

What I want to suggest in the next part of this chapter is that the amalgamated tastes of newly global London, and the old ‘essences’ they are ‘engulfing’, are in some respects not really so different. Rather the cultural practices ‘local’ to east London have always, to varying degrees, been characterised by disjunctures, interruptions, and the contributions of ‘strangers’.

Undoubtedly eating jellied eels doused in malt vinegar is a practice that has been mimetically

⁷ Phil Cohen, *The Last Island* (Dagenham: Centre for New Ethnicities Research, 1998), 4.

⁸ Michel de Certeau, Pierre Mayol and Luce Girard, *The Practice of Everyday Life: Vol. 2*, (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1998), 171.

passed down, in some instances between three, four or even five generations of east Londoners, and is part of a local culture.⁹ However, I want to suggest that beneath this seeming linear intergenerational transmission of taste are a myriad of intercultural negotiations, disruptions and synergies that reveal the amenability to difference at the heart of 'cockney' culture and cuisine.

In order to highlight the difference between indigenous essences *of* the Thames estuary, and the reality of tastes *for* them, I first want to first delve into the biography of the seafood stand itself, before moving into the transnational, cross-cultural history of a taste for its fare. Having done this I will shift the attention towards the lives of Tubby Isaac's patrons, and the biographical journeys that result in their desire for the stand's produce. In doing so, I want to suggest that the use of London's local seafood in the narrativisation of a historically fixed identity and community, represents the theft and reduction of an inherently complex and historically transcultural social milieu by a hegemonic nationalist narrative intent of forgetting all but its own fictions. Beyond that, I want to argue that within the contemporary life of the stand, and despite the narratives of its patrons, are traces of this unwritten local history, inside which are invaluable lessons for the negotiation of everyday life in the contemporary city.

The Acquisition of Local Taste

To be sure eels, mussels, crabs, shrimps and oysters are quintessential tastes *of* London. This micro-ecology of molluscs, fish and crustaceans has lived in the mouth of the Thames for super-eons prior to *homo sapiens*' first arrival on the south east of the British landmass some

⁹ One particularly powerful illustration of this mimetic transmission was evident when one visitor to the stand purchased 25 pounds worth of seafood, buying two portions of everything that he chose – one for himself, and one for his grandfather.

29,000 years ago.¹⁰ While the collection of fauna sold at the seafood stand are quintessences of the south eastern terrain, this does not, however, imply that a taste *for* these morsels is also chthonic. On the contrary, historical evidence suggests that a local taste for these morsels has a far more recent history – or at least one that can be traced back through millennia, rather than eons. It is however a less recent history than that of the national cultural identity, under which this tangled mess of culture and history has been swept.

As I will argue below, the social and historical contingencies through which the local taste for Tubby Isaac's was sedimented are multi-layered; characterised by imperial conquests, trade between middle-age city states, and latterly, the formation of modern nation-states and the back-drafts they entailed. While this history will go back several centuries, I want to start with a brief note on the relatively more recent arrival of Tubby Isaac's seafood stand itself; as the modern part of the story about seafood in east London can be told through it alone.

Tubby Isaac's itself was established in 1919 when Itzko Brener of Whitechapel, a rotund young Jewish Russian migrant known locally as 'Tubby', rented a 3ft by 6ft pitch at the junction of Whitechapel and Aldgate High Streets (where it still stands). Having looked carefully at the business opportunities available to him, considered a growing trend for eel and pie bars (these were numbered at around 130 and growing, in turn of the century London) and ignored Jewish orthodoxy, he started a small business selling eels.^{11,12} These he bought every morning from traders at the nearby Billingsgate market, before wheeling them up the banks of the Thames on a barrow to become one coster amongst the many competing for

10 "Channel 4 - News - Red Lady skeleton 29,000 years old." *Channel 4 website*. Channel 4 - News. 2007-10-30. http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/science_technology/red+lady+skeleton+29000+years+old/979762. Accessed April 2nd 2010.

11 Kathryn Hawkins and Ian Garlick, *The Food of London* (Rutland: Tuttle Publishing, 2002).

12 Eel, the 'fish' that Tubby first chose is not defined as Kosher, owing its lack of external scales – Kosher fish being those with scales and fins, according to Jewish Orthodoxy.

business amidst the hyper-osmic burble of Petticoat Lane market. Tubby and his eels did particularly good business, as evidenced by the fact that the business still stands today. That he did good business in the market, however, is as much related to a preexisting ‘taste’ for his eels, as it is to the entrepreneurialism that made them readily available to users Petticoat Lane. It is the story of this preexistent taste, that follows; not quite a complete history, but by no means a fisherman's tale.

As mentioned above, eels, oysters, crabs and mussels have lived in and around the Thames for as long as the south coast of British Isles have been characterised by chalk cliffs: these cliffs being the sediment of mollusc shells and fish bones over epochal time.¹³ The sedimentation of a taste for these creatures, however is but a mere sliver on top of these chalky strata. In 1995, about a five-minute walk and twelve years away from the current location of Tubby Isaac's seafood stand, archaeologists were conducting a mandatory survey prior to the implementation of a large reconstruction project in the Spitalfields area of east London. Particularly interesting was the dig being conducted at Spital Square – a site of stubborn poverty since the healing fields and abbey were hurriedly built over with slum dwellings for weavers and tanners at the onset of the industrial revolution.¹⁴ Over the course of their inspection, the archaeologists unearthed many artefacts relating to the area's shifting role throughout the life of the city. Especially notable however, for its rarity and immaculate preservation was a sarcophagus belonging to a high-status female, perhaps a princess, in her early twenties. Surrounded by both Roman and pre-Roman burial goods, what is especially interesting given our molluscular attention, is that the sarcophagus was decorated on the outside with a border of perfectly imprinted scallop shells. This particular find itself says little about the consumption of seafood in Roman Britain. However, it is highly suggestive of the reverence that British-Romans had for the near shallows, which were apparently sacred.

¹³ Interestingly, these also provide the calcium in the water for the fish bones and shells of the contemporary South East, locking the chalk cliffs and the molluscs of the Thames Estuary in a peculiar chicken and egg relationship.

¹⁴ The fact that the fields were believed to be a place of convalescence is reflected in the area's name; Spital-fields – an area name etymologically related to the modern term, ‘hospital’.



Scallop shell lined sarcophagus, Photograph, Museum of London

This apparent reverence for the sea and its fauna, suggested by the sarcophagus' decorative lining, chimes very strongly with the conspicuous lack of any evidence suggesting the consumption of any fish or seafood in south-east Britain prior to the Romans' arrival in AD 43.¹⁵ Although there are many such suggestions of reverence for

the ocean, when the archaeological traces of Iron Age south-east Britain are compared to those extracted from estuarial regions of the North Sea contemporary to it, there is a conspicuous absence of the mountainous middens of mollusc shells found elsewhere around the North Sea.¹⁶ What is more, through the methods of forensic archaeology scholars have discerned a complete lack of any traces of the sea in the bones of Iron-Age 'Britons'.

Despite this pre-Roman local prohibition, within the same strata of earth in which the princess was buried, are several collections of fish bones, mollusc shells, amphorae containing the Romans' beloved salt-fish sauces, as well as utensils for their production.¹⁷ As the commingling of aristocrats' and fish bones in the earth of the early millennium suggest, within

15 Locker cites evidence of Iron Age seafood consumption in northern British coastal areas, especially the Orkney Isles and on the coasts of Denmark and in Belgium, which render conspicuous the lack of such finds in the south east. See: Alison Locker, "In pibiscus diversi; The Bone Evidence for Fish Consumption in Roman Britain," *Britannia* XXXVIII (2007), 141.

16 Keith Dobney and Anton Ervynck, "To Fish or Not to Fish? Evidence for the possible avoidance of fish consumption during the Iron Age around the North Sea," in *The Later Iron Age in Britain and Beyond*, ed. Colin Hasel Grave and Tom Moore (Oxford: Oxbow Books 2007).

17 Liquamen and garum, similar in many respects to fermented fish sauces used in contemporary Thai and Vietnamese cooking, and in a coincidental continuity, one of the most widely available, and used flavourings in east London today. For more on the Roman love of fish sauce see: Alison Locker, "In pibiscus diversi; The Bone Evidence for Fish Consumption in Roman Britain," *Britannia* XXXVIII (2007), 143.

Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History* (London: Johnathon Cape, 2002), 17-91.

two hundred years of the first Roman occupation the Romans' infamous taste for all things maritime was widespread across the south east of the British Isle. Accordingly it is possible to suggest that through the commingling of the princesses and fish bones, that in early Roman London, an emergent 'taste' for seafood accompanied religious reverence for seafood within British-Roman culture. The exact process through which this alimentary regime became sedimented across this corner of the isle is unclear, and the archaeological evidence too scant to even speculate on the dynamics of the process. What is clear however is that at some level, those living in proximity to these new battalions and communities of administrators, whether in Rome or not, would increasingly do as the Romans did. In perhaps one of the earliest demonstrations of the relationship between power, social formation and 'taste' within the British Isles, revered *seafauna* became *seafood*.

From the Romans' arrival in 43 AD and the arrival of the first batch of Colchester oysters in Rome, seafood consumption in London grew steadily for the next 1900 years.¹⁸ The growth was stimulated when, several centuries later, Norman conquest precipitated new fishing rights and the specialisation and professionalisation of fishermen. With such advances across Europe, as well as the development of larger hulls and nets, North Sea herring became increasingly important. As a result, the Hanseatic league of German, Polish and Scandinavian cities grew – along with London – substantially in girth through the fishing of the 'easterling' herring. The league were so successful, that they developed a currency so stable that 'easterling

18 The classical Mediterranean taste for seafood is of course well known, and in his famous encyclopedia, 'The Natural History,' Pliny dedicates a whole volume to seafood, its varieties and qualities. He even makes a record of the British oyster which it seems was kept alive, packed in snow in wells on boats and exported to Rome – a delightful contraband smuggled in from the colonies in spite of sumptuary laws regulating the consumption food commonly associated with frivolity and decadence. Pliny The Elder, *The Natural History of Pliny* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1890), 468.

Sumptuary laws were in fact implemented in Rome to regulate the over-consumption of the imported molluscs, previously from the Nile Delta and elsewhere in Europe. These it seems, like so much contraband, were a luxury associated with the type of festivity and debauchery that might destabilise an empire. See: Alfred, C. Andrews, "Oysters as Food in Greece and Rome," *The Classical Journal* 43:5 (1948): 299-303.

silver', later sterling, became the denomination most commonly stipulated for trade between London merchants.¹⁹

While the growth in the consumption of seafood is multi-causal and irreducible to any one event, the affordability and importance of eels to Londoners in particular, were shaped by the great fire of September of 1667. At the same time as the fire was burning, just over one hundred miles away on the other side of the North Sea, mature *anguilla anguilla* (European eels) were starting their migration out of Dutch river estuaries. While these eels left with the intention of crossing the Atlantic to the Sargasso Sea where they would breed and die, Dutch eel fishermen had them destined for other futures. Days after having caught them in the specialist traps and nets they had set along the deltas of their coast, the Dutchmen sailed up the Thames to a smouldering London with their catch. Here, they were apparently inundated with starving Londoners needing sustenance. In the coming years, when the King of England reopened the city's main fish market, Billingsgate, the Dutch eel fishermen – as a reward for feeding a city in need – were granted special permission to bypass the notorious middle men of the market.²⁰ Accordingly it was solely Dutch fishermen who sold eels directly to the public, and increasingly cheaply, off their boats; a practice that lasted well into the nineteenth century.²¹

In terms of the wide availability of sea-fauna, most previous developments are superseded in impact by the advent of steam. Once they became viable in the late nineteenth century, steam boats considerably increased the efficiency of the shallow-water fleets and precipitated the

19 William Camden and Robert D. Dunn, *Remains Concerning Britain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 171.

20 Pacific Steam Navigation Company, *Sea Breezes: The Ship Lovers' Digest* (London: C. Birchell, 1970), 574.

21 Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: G. Newbold, 1851), 66.

discovery of new fishing grounds.²² However it was less the water-borne advances of the steam boat than the acceleration of rail travel that impacted on the relationship between maritime flavours and the city of London. It was this above all else, the weaving of steel threads across the country and the rolling of carriages across them, that irreversibly yoked the British coast and its fauna to the early modern metropole – and in turn connected the metropole to the nation – in both imaginary and in more obviously material ways.²³ As a consequence of rail travel, fishing towns that landed the sizeable investments on offer from rail companies, flourished. And they flourished not only as both fishing towns with new access to the nations markets but also, where scenery permitted it, as holiday resorts. Great numbers of city dwellers from across London began departing for short trips to the wet sands and rock pools clustered around the cliffs and dunes of the isle's south east shores. Lines such as the Great Eastern Railway's 'cockle special' to Southend, stopped at all stops in the east of London before depositing its passengers to stand, sand between toes meditating on the world beyond.

More significantly, on the way to such trips, which no doubt intensified a taste for the sea in the city, colossal trains laden with molluscs and fish were passing in the opposite direction, towards London. So voluminous was the daily movement of sea-fauna across the country by rail that the main rail companies soon opened special departments to co-ordinate the

22 Most significant of the new fishing grounds was a colossal new oyster bed mid-channel between Shoreham and LeHarve, as well as the 'Great Silver Pits' 60 miles off the shore of northern Britain. John Dyson, *Business in Great Waters* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1977), 74.

23 Of no no small significance was the changing role of the coast in the imagination of Londoners themselves. With the advent of steam, the industrialisation of printing and the new imperative to produce national myths, the Isle's coastlines with their wet sand, caves, grottos, tales of brave admirals and daredevil buccaneers, would play a crucial part. In the 'higher arts' the coast was also privileged to receive increased attention, with artists such as Turner attempting to evoke a mystique and promise inherent to the island's coastline. It is hard to evaluate the effects that increased literary and artistic reference to oceans and coasts had on the psyche of the metropole. However if looking at the increasing numbers that were starting to visit the coast, paddle in rock pools and collect flora and fauna as souvenirs or dinner for themselves, it can be assumed that the effects of such motifs were of some degree of significance. For a history of shell collecting that displays these shifts well see: Peter Dance, *Shell Collecting, A History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

unprecedented land-borne maritime migrations. The scale of the transition from water to land based transportatio of seafood is summed up well in an account from the time:

“Of old, nine-tenths of the supply came by way of river, the little that came by land being conveyed from the coast, at great expense, in four-horse vans. Now the railways are day by day supplanting smacks, and in many cases steamers; for by means of its iron arms, London, whilst its millions are in slumber, grasps the produce of every sea that beats against our island coast... Thus every night in the season the hardy fishermen of Yarmouth catch a hundred tons, principally herring, which, by means of the Eastern Counties rail, are by next morning at Billingsgate.”²⁴

Not only did the age of the steamer and railways affect the quantity and range of fish available to Londoners but also the price, making relatively fresh seafood available to the majority of Londoners.²⁵ More than merely one protein amongst others, North Sea herring and eel were comparable in economic and social importance to the crude oil extracted from the North Sea today.²⁶

It is not surprising then, given the growing popularity, availability and strategic importance of this fare, that in the mid nineteenth century the first of east London’s dedicated pie and eel shops is recorded, belonging to John Antnik: a Dutch man.²⁷ Not long after Antnik opened his first shop, several chains of eel and pie shops emerged elsewhere in the city. Most notable amongst these, for the fact that a handful still remain, were the shops set up by Manzes, an Italian who migrated from the Amalfi coast, and who sensed something of his coastal home in the trade of eels and fish in and around the Thames. It was in the wake of this industrial

24 William Gifford, et. al. *The Quarterly Review Vol. XCV* (London: J Murray 1886), 273-274.

25 Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: G. Woodfall, 1851), 62-79.

26 Dyson, John. *Business in Great Waters: The Story of British Fishermen*. (London: Angus and Robertson Publishers, 1977), 43.

27 Kathryn Hawkins and Ian Garlick, *The Food of London* (Rutland: Tuttle Publishing, 2002), 16.

explosion in pie and eel shops that Itzko Brenner, or ‘Tubby Isaac,’ cast Kosher guidelines aside and seized on the, by now ubiquitous, taste for eels.

However it is at this point, as families of migrants and ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’ were making ‘local food’ widely, accessible to the industrial city’s populace, that, as Phil Cohen notes, other new inventions were starting to take hold. Not unrelated to the emergence of rail travel, and a new sense of national space shaped by transport and media, was the figure of ‘the cockney’: “a discursive composite... the very back bone of nation and Empire... constructed by distinction from, and in opposition to, the figure of the immigrant... a corrupting presence dragging the nation down.”²⁸

The next stage in the biography of Tubby Isaac’s is very much tied to the creation of this figure, and the attempt to lay a sense of cohesive national identity over the knotted mess of histories and culture in east London. In the first half of the century, Tubby saw his business grow in parallel to the growth of industry and commerce. However in 1930s east London became a hotbed of inter-war fascism and antisemitism. The late nineteenth century invention of ‘the cockney’ in particular, and attempts to create a narrative of Britishness and Empire that excluded the contributions of ‘others,’ heavily impacted on the lives of Jewish migrants who had made their home in east London.²⁹ As chapter four details the tail end of the 30s, large rallies were coordinated regularly within the area with the intention of driving the migratory populace out with intimidation and ‘returning’ the streets to its ‘indigenous’ heirs. At the same time, a war, waged against fascists, and a potential invasion was on the horizon. Accordingly Tubby, along with his wife, two sons and a large number of other Jewish families living in east London, left, through Southampton, for New York.³⁰

28 Phil Cohen in David Morely, *Home Territories* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 199.

29 Kenneth Lunn and Richard C. Thurlow, *British Fascism* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1980).

30 Lecture: *Saving and Losing Spitalfields with Dan Cruickshank*, Bishopsgate Institute, 16 June, 2008.

However, as the brief sketch of the *long durée* out of which the stand emerges makes plain, the local *taste for* these morsels, which is distinct from their flavour, arises out of a far less geographically bounded set of processes. First and foremost, the taste for British seafood is exemplary of the impact on palates precipitated by the material and cultural aspects of colonial occupation. The endurance of a taste for these maritime morsels is also, in the case of the period between Norman Invasion and Elizabethan London, exemplarily of the extent to which ruling power exploits and amplifies pre-existent tastes for the purposes of revenue collection, expansion and the sustenance of a labour force. Perhaps most importantly, the history of the seafood stand reveals the extent to which the tastes seeded throughout the last two millennia in London, were delivered to London en masse by modern technologies helmed by traders and merchants who arrived in London having been scattered throughout Europe.

Presenting such a history is by no means an attempt to suggest that a taste for seafood in London, and the peculiar practice of eating jellied eels is not local. On the contrary, it is a highly localised practice. What is important to note here is that, the cravings for the brackish flesh of the island's near shallows are not prefigured by the peculiar relationship of a local people to the muddy earth of the city. Contrary to the meaning given to the fare by some of Tubby Isaac's patrons, and analogous academic interpretations of 'authentic, pre global, local cuisine,' this is a taste that emerges out of relationship that local culture had to its local river – the river being not a body merely a local body of water, but an inherent connection to the sea, and through that, to elsewhere. In this respect, both the taste for the stand's food, and the gradual disappearance of a taste for it, can be understood as part of an ongoing process of border crossing and cultural smudging prefigured by the city's historical existence as a port, and its current existence tangled within junctions of global exchange.

Admittedly there is little evidence of the ‘amenability to difference’ evidenced over the *long durée* of seafood consumption in London, within the Sunday morning exchange transcribed at the start of this chapter. In fact, the way that a number of its customers narrativise difference and identity can often suggest an extreme sensitivity and hostility towards ‘otherness’.

However, as I want to argue below, beneath the discursive construction of identity and community, and within their corporeal experience and everyday life around the stand, the types of cross cultural process tracked over the *long durée*, are in fact tangible.

’Ello Stranger

John Kean is 86 years old and, from his birth in early twentieth century Hackney, has been a regular customer at Tubby Isaac’s.³² John was such a regular customer, and entertainer of other customers, that for a time he also worked behind the stand. While not the most efficient stall-holder, John always drew a crowd, not least because of his performance – or at least spectators’ perception of it.³³ In his mannerisms, accent, disposition and general comportment, he appears as the embodiment of the ‘real cockney,’ – the discursive composite against which the figure of the migrant is constructed – white, working-class, cheeky, and fiercely proud of local culture. So perfected is John’s performance of an old-time east Londoner, that in his latter years he has stumbled upon a career in acting, with an agent who calls him up whenever an advertiser or film-maker needs an actor capable of doing what Phil Cohen refers to as this mythical “salt of the earth” and the “backbone of the nation” figure.³⁴

³² In many respects, it would be possible to tell an entirely different history of this particular seafood stand, in terms of John’s relationship with it.

³³ John lost his job at the seafood stand, it seems, because of his ability to draw a crowd with his stories. Spending so much time chatting to customers meant that he often ignored other customers who wanted to make a purchase and leave. As such, at the time of writing, John is once again simply a talkative customer.

³⁴ Generally the roles are small ones, but he is often the first port of call when the director of the advert or music video requires a visual and aural shortcut to an archetypal ‘white working-class Londoner. This he tells me, follows in the footsteps of his ancestor, the famous Shakespearean actor, Edmund Kean.

Certainly, it is characters such as that performed by John, that people like the aforementioned customer have in mind when they narrate the loss of a community with a direct connection to the city, a “proper old-timer” as one customer refers to him. The distance, however, between the figure – connected to the city, by blood and earth – and the reality of John’s everyday life, his own self-understanding, and his relationship with ‘others’, is revealed when John talks about the two loves of his life – his deceased wife, and seafood.

John does not just eat seafood once a week, on his visit to the stand, as many of the regular customers do. Rather, John is proud to inform me that he eats “seafood six and an’ ’alf times a week.” At the time I conducted an extended interview with him in his home, John had two herring prepared for lunch, and a sea-bass already defrosting for his evening meal, and another which he gave to me as a gift. Throughout the interview, John extolled the virtues of seafood, in particular eels, which he credited with his longevity and ‘vitality’ in his old age. There is no doubting the exceptional importance of seafood to John’s everyday life, which is integral to both his health and various forms of self identification.

Indeed, as might be expected from his being born in the East End of the early twentieth century, both the sensoria of sea-side trips, but also locally consumed jellied eels, cockles and whelks were an extension of John’s habitus, and sources of strong attachment.³⁵ Such food, he recalls were homely, reassuring and distinct from the garlicky food he remembers being sold in fancy cafes in Islington. The development of his real love of seafood, and its complete integration with his everyday routine, however, occurred later in life, and elsewhere. In fact, it occurred in near perfect reverse of the gustatory journey taken first by the Romans that

35 “The smell of garlic,” John tells me, recalling a previous way of being with a slightly screwed-up face, “used to really turn me off.”

arrived in London with their taste for the sea, and by *Signor Manzes* – the aforementioned Italian fisherman, who translated his taste for the sea, into a literacy in pie, eel and mash.

In 1943, John was part of the Allied forces that entered Italy by way of the Amalfi Coast. Sharing a base with American forces on the coast of the Terranean Sea, John “had the good fortune” to meet and marry “an Italian fisherman’s daughter,” who remained his wife for more than forty years. Over the period of their marriage, they spent nearly every summer in Solerno, during which John learnt to speak, pray and sing in fluent Italian (he sings small operettas, in Italian, several times during our interview). Perhaps most relevant to our current focus, his wife and her family of fishermen started to “really teach” John about seafood, building his childhood affinity with the Thames estuarial waters, into a deep knowledge of both fish and fishing off Italy’s west coast. Up until a year before our interview, he was still going out with his extended family for the summer on their fishing boats.

Now a widower, and unable to go out on the fishing boats anymore for health reason, the most regular and perhaps most powerful connection John feels with his wife and her culture remains the regular meals he conjures, cooking the mussels or prawns he buys from Tubby Isaac’s, “in the Italian way, a delicacy way,” with “white wine, Italian herbs and garlic.” The power of specific aromas and flavours to elicit episodic memory ensures his ability to continually experience a set of formative scenes – sounds, sights, smells and flavours. Most importantly for us, this transnational connection, forged through an affinity for the sea, informs the way in which he thinks and talks about himself, as well as the East End culture through which he lives. The following response to my questions about where he feels most at home, where he would rather be, is particularly instructive:

“Listen, in Italy, there’s a word, *straneri*.”

“*Straneri*?” I ask, rolling the ‘r’s in a way that I consider to be an Italian accent.

“No, *Straneri*,” he corrects me, subtly affecting an Italian accent. “It means stranger. Listen. We are all strangers in this world, and we all bleed red blood. And we all worship God irrespective of what we call him. We’re all strangers.”

“Huh. Well, yeah,” I remark, scribbling down the remark in my notebook, checking that my recorder was on.

Within the exchange transcribed above, the use of the word *straneri* and the meaning he attributes to it, typifies the world view that John articulated several times throughout the interview. Although the word looks and sounds a lot like the English stranger, translating directly from contemporary vernacular Italian usage, the best translation for *straneri* is ‘foreigner,’ or ‘aliens’. In this sense the word is highly suggestive of the exceptional social types, such as the immigrant, through which the ideal of exclusive ethnic belonging, such as that represented by ‘the cockney’ is produced. John’s usage however, as the exchange above demonstrates, is significantly different in an important, and sociologically insightful way. For John, the stranger and strangeness is not an exception through which sameness is constructed, but the rule, a characteristic of all human relationships. “We are all,” John claims, “strangers in this world.”

In the deferral to the figure of the stranger in order to articulate his transcultural, humanist sentiment, John of course speaks within a long line of sociological literature on ‘the stranger’, the progenitor of which is Georg Simmel’s famous portrait of an archetypal urban figure. At her heart, for Simmel, the stranger is defined, not just against the local, but against both the ‘wanderer’ and the ‘local’, as a specific type of individual who “comes today,” and who “stays tomorrow,” admitted into the group based on universal human traits but bringing “qualities

into it that are not, and cannot be indigenous to it.”³⁶ The figure is especially important for Simmel as a way to explain the relationship between social formation and the experience of simultaneous closeness and distance, that characterises many modern relationships shorn of the determinations of kinship or nation.³⁷ For John, the experience of closeness based on human universals, and of distance produced through affinities with elsewhere, very much characterises his own existence and his daily culinary conjuring of the Amalfi coast, in his Walthamstow kitchen. So John’s self-identification with ‘the stranger’ is very much in distinction to the discursively composed figure of the cockney, bound by birth and blood to location. The figure presented by John is not however distinct in the sense of the being the antithesis to the ‘local’. Rather, distinct in the manner in which he presents a completely different account of how senses of affinity, belonging and community are constructed, i.e. out of cross cultural movement that integrates difference into the heart of relationships grounded in common human affinities.

A Bit of the Other

Although Simmel also stressed the positive aspects of the stranger’s experience, and her importance to metropolitan forms of social formation, he also stressed several potential negative aspects of the stranger’s experience. Amongst these, of greatest concern to Simmel are incidences when strangeness completely subsumes all individual characteristics in other’s perception of the stranger. It is on this caution that Simmel closes his famous essay with reflections of the predicament of European Jews. It is often at this point that later thinkers have picked up Simmel’s ‘social type’ and elaborated on it. Like John, and Simmel, Zigmunt

36 Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 144.

37 *Ibid.*, 148.

Bauman also notes the ubiquity of the strangeness and strangers in contemporary culture.³⁸ Augmenting Simmel – and John’s – thesis, Bauman goes on to suggest and that while we may all be strangers, we are largely divisible into the two very different types of stranger that typify contemporary, globalised existence. Ultimately, for Bauman, these types can be reduced generally be subdivided into being either a “vagabond” (which includes the figures of the involuntarily mobile refugee and the impoverished economic migrant), and the “tourist,” whose mobility is very much voluntary. The difference between these two types can be expressed in terms of their sensory experience. The vagabond, for instance, must by necessity develop new sensory affinities and tolerances of a new environment to get by. Conversely, as chapter four argued, such is the power and capital invested in the tourist that, rather than being compelled to either contribute towards or assimilate local culture, entire sensory landscapes are transformed to suit her. As Tim Edensnor’s argument, details, the carefully mediated multisensory landscape of the tourist enclave is designed precisely to create a familiar experience suited to the tourists’ habitus. The only hints of difference are consumables; a themed dinner, for instance.³⁹ The result is a social type that experiences ‘distance’, without the loss of a sense of ‘closeness,’ and is able to luxuriously transcend the boredom of its own existence without being subject to any demands from others.

Certainly it can be imagined how the ‘Brit abroad,’ let alone the British armed forces abroad, might fit the profile of Bauman’s touristic stranger. John’s self-identification with the stranger, could also be an identification with the type that Bauman rightly alerts us to the danger of. So familiar are such figures that bell hooks explicitly references British working class vernacular, ‘to have a “a bit of the other”’ when referring to the inherent danger of the majoritarian

38 Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

39 Tim Edensnor ‘Sensing Tourist Spaces’ in Claudio Minca and Tim Oakes, *Travels in Paradox* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 31-33.

tourist and their tendency to “eat” “the other.”⁴⁰ For hooks, touristic strangers, and their encounters with strangeness, despite promising to “counter the terrorising force of the *status quo*,” ultimately refortify their own “mainstream positionality.” This is primarily, as Bauman’s typology suggests, because the ‘tourist’, unlike the ‘vagabond’, is able to dictate the terms of the interaction within which she is a stranger.

It must be remembered, however, that the figure of the stranger that Simmel sketches, which is akin to the ‘social type’ John evokes in the telling of his biography, is not simply a wanderer who moves from one encounter to another, asserting her own ‘mainstream positionality’.

Rather she is a synthesis of the wanderer and the long-term dweller; characterised primarily by the fact that, at least for a significant period of time, she stays. It is because of this fact that she must also familiarise herself with a new set of sensory experiences so as to maintain her sense of equilibrium, and be able enter into social situations. Moreover, at the same time as assimilating new sensory affinities and learning local forms of propriety, she must contribute something to the group that “is not, and cannot be indigenous to it,” so as to assert her place in it.⁴¹ It is then Simmel’s ‘stranger’, rather than Bauman’s ‘tourist’, that best fits the figure that John identifies with. Perhaps even more importantly, it is Simmel’s stranger that John expresses an ethical commitment towards when recognising the figure in others.

There are of course numerous situations within the everyday life of London where cross-cultural traffic consists of little more than a touristic eating of the other. Incursions of visiting football supporters from Ipswich on to Brick Lane for a post-match lager, curry and fight, the shuffling of the City’s businessmen eastwards into a Shoreditch “Gentlemen’s Clubs - New

40 bell hooks, *Black Looks* (London: Turnaround, 1992), 21.

41 Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 144.

Girls, Arrived Today.” In such instances, the figure of the stranger becomes nothing but “itself”; symbolising only a consumable form of otherness and devoid of individual characteristics and denied the concomitant respect that comes with individuality. Yet the consequences of these fleeting encounters between strangers are not the same as those which we trace in the everyday life of the seafood stand, nor elsewhere in the multilayered, poly-sensory culture of east London. Consider again, briefly, the story of Tubby Isaac, the archetypal stranger of Simmel’s typology, and the ‘vagabond’ of Bauman’s writing. Changes to his habitus are evident in his assimilation of the local tastes for fish without scales and fins, and his choice to trade in a non-Kosher food. In other elements of life around the stand, however, it is also possible to trace the contributions of Tubby and his vagabond contemporaries to the rhythms and flavours of their own lived experiences to life in east London. This is evident not least in the fact that, despite there being very few Jewish traders left, Tubby’s Petticoat Lane market remains at its nosiest, aromatic and crowded, not on Saturdays as with most British markets, but on the Sunday – after the Jewish Sabbath. This is a part of traditional local culture, hard fought for by Jewish traders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴² However, as I will argue below, neither John, nor portly Itzko is exceptional in hosting a cross-cultural dialogue through the seafood stand; and such conversations are actually far more common than might be expected.

Season to Taste

On Sundays, which as mentioned remain Petticoat Lane’s busiest days, a considerable number of visitors to the market and to Tubby Isaac’s are, like the speaker at the start of this chapter,

⁴² *The Parliamentary Debates CLXX* (H. M. Stationery Office, 1907), 1175.
John Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980).
Geoffrey Alderman, *London Jewry and London Politics, 1889-1986* (CUP Archive, 1989), 92.

former residents of the area; many of whom left for elsewhere in south-east Britain in the post-war migration to suburbia famously recorded by Michael Young and Peter Willmott.⁴³ A portion of the visitors on Sundays, however, return to the stand from even further afield, especially during holiday periods, drifting back from their lives as ex-patriots in southern France, Spain and elsewhere. One visitor even insists the first destination that the taxi driver takes him when he arrives back in London from his ex-pat existence in South Africa, is Tubby Isaac's. These Sunday visitors come to the market, it seems, partly to touch base with what they feel to be a spiritual home, and a set of flavours and cadences, distinct from that of their resting place.⁴⁴ But they also come, it seems, to bemoan the changes the area has undergone since their departure, the proliferation of strangeness in a landscape that was once familiar, and to reaffirm their sense of now belonging elsewhere. Ironically however, these strangers – referred to as 'strangers' with the greeting "‘ello Stranger," – also bring back to the seafood stand new tastes and cravings acquired while dining alfresco abroad. On one occasion, a man in his late fifties who had returned to east London for a few weeks from his retirement in northern Spain, asked Paul, if he could get hold of juvenile eels – elvers – and shallot vinegar to go with his oysters, as he had been enjoying these regularly 'at home', and had become accustomed to them, while unaccustomed to the jelly and chilli vinegar of *mariscos ala Aldgate*. Paul returned the request with an unsure look. "I don't, know mate, but we could try it out when I expand to the Costa' if you like."

While Sundays are the favoured days for returning East End exiles to visit the seafood stand, during the week the majority of visitors to Petticoat Lane's 'Food Court' are generally one of

43 Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

44 British and patriotic yet distinct from touristic strangers and often very empathetic towards their hosts.

For more see:

Karen O'Reilly, *The British on the Costa Del Sol: Transnational Identities and Local Communities* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000).

Tita Beaven, "A Life in the Sun: Accounts of New Lives Abroad as Intercultural Narratives," *Language and Intercultural Communication* 7, no. 3 (2007): 188.

two types: Either they are women that visit the market's surrounding wholesalers to buy 'traditional' West African-styled dresses, boubous, and wraps that they have parcelled up and sent, en masse, to Africa. Or they are builders, cleaners, and office workers from the nearby City dropping in for a cheap lunch. Interestingly, a handful of the markets visitors, especially those who grew up within West African coastal contexts, also have a remarkable homegrown affinity for seafood, and shellfish in particular.⁴⁵ Occasionally these visitors follow their noses, southward, out of the main body of the market area, past the trailers selling Japanese *katsu* curries, falafels, and Thai fish cakes, through the a street lined with empty market stall frames towards Tubby Isaac's. Upon occasion (I witnessed this twice while conducting research around the seafood stand) somebody even pre-empts his visit to the seafood stand, brings with him to the market, a jar or bottle of *shito*; a blend of powdered shrimp, cayenne, herring, salt and onion, which he pours all over fish sticks and whelks he buys, and shares with his colleagues.

Rivers Rekindled, and Culture Remade

Of course, most of the stand's visitors do not bring condiments to their maritime meal. All, however, bring rich sensory memories with which they dress their small portions of cockles and whelks. Some of these very personal forms of seasoning evidently add more to the sensation of a dish than any condiment ever could. I am thinking not least here of one particular visitor to the stand – a regular, about thirty-five years old. Raheem has been coming to the seafood stand every other Thursday during his brief lunch break from the trading floors of the City of London, for the last five years. Like many of the stand's regular visitors, Raheem comes to participate in the banter that often accompanies a bowl of mussels, and to

⁴⁵ Benedict Satia, *A Regional Survey of the Aquaculture Sector in Africa South of the Sahara*, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/t6800e/t6800e03.htm#TopOfPage> accessed 16 May 2007.

interact with faces with which he has become relatively familiar. Having previously seen him at the stand on a several occasions, I eventually get round to speaking to him about my, and his, reasons for being there. “So when, exactly, did you first try this food?” I ask him as he chews his way towards the bottom of a pot of green-lipped mussels.

He glances up and to the side towards me, and replies, after swallowing, “What, this stuff here? Or fish in general?”

“Both. Well, no. Seafood and stuff.”

“All of my life. I’ve eaten this all my life.” He returns to his mussels.

“What about this stall? You sound local. Have you lived in London all your life?”

“No.”

“Sorry. You don’t mind...?”

A long pause as he nonchalantly chews and swallows another mouthful, shaking his head “No no.

That’s fine. Iraq. I was born in Baghdad.”

“Huh. Wow... How long have you lived here then?”

“Fourteen years. I left... I moved to London fifteen years ago”

“The first gulf war?”

“After it... There’s good fish in Baghdad.” He starts poking the last mussel around in the remaining coral pink seafood sauce at the bottom of his small plastic pot, staring through it. “We’ve got this local dish ‘margous’. It’s like a barbecued fish.” A pause as I wait for further details. He stops playing with his food and looks up and right into the recesses of his memory. “I don’t know the English translation.. what type.”

“Is it a sea or freshwater fish?”

“The fish? From the river.”

“The Tigris?” I respond, at an octave too high for normal conversation. I try and joke. “Not the cleanest river anymore.” Another long pause. “What about seafood and shellfish and stuff. Like mussels? Did you... do you get that in Baghdad?”

“Yeah yeah. I mean. But we didn’t. I used to have that on holiday... in Egypt,” Raheem says, before putting the final mussel, now coated in seafood sauce, into his mouth, chewing it more slowly than before.

Bringing no seasoning or condiments to his lunch, what Raheem brings with him to each mouthful, as the slightly awkward exchange above suggests, is a bitter sweet sensation. Such feelings are not uncommon lunch-time accompaniments within the meze of mobile communities and individuals that populate cities like London. It is after all, smell and taste that are most able to conjure entire episodes from previous experience, episodes which for many of the individuals pushed and pulled them toward contemporary cities. Accordingly flavours often produce a sense of home amidst the un-homely experience of every day dislocation. This is by no means, however a straightforward feeling. Not only do flavours and aromas from an individual's past spark synaesthetic episodic memories of home, but they also provide a point of stability against which biographical change can be measured – an embodied sense of things gained, as well as the home that has been left behind.

The sense of loss produced through a familiar smell or taste from an individual's biography, is already well documented. In her account of a long-lost peach, Nadia Seremetakis draws on a particular etymology of nostalgia, “the desire or longing with a burning pain to journey,”⁴⁶ to articulate the corporeal sense of loss and distance produced through the memory of a peach, heightened by the shortcomings of available flavours with which to sate it. As discussed elsewhere in this author's work, one user of Ridley Road Market spoke in very similar terms about her dissatisfaction with the South Asian alfonso mangoes, the cheapest and most common sold at London's street markets, yet incomparable to the small fibrous mangoes that she sucked between her tongue and palate as a child in St Lucia.⁴⁷ However, in this instance, the glance back in time elicited by the mango afforded the individual, Marcia, the space to reflect on the sweetness that her life had taken on in the half century since her arrival in

46 Nadia Seremetakis, *The Senses Still* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4.

47 Alex Rhys-Taylor, “The Irrepressibility of Magnifera,” *Eurozine*, April, 2007. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-04-23-rhystaylor-en.html> accessed 6th July, 2008.

London, despite the loss of cherished textures. The oscillation between painful nostalgia and elated relief triggered by a familiar taste or aroma seems all the more intense for Raheem, for whom the re-assembled memory is of a river, once at the heart of local culture, yet which has, in recent years, become a frontline in a sectarian conflict, and a mass burial ground.⁴⁸

Importantly, however, the embodied sense of loss conjured by familiar texture and flavour, and the corporeal connection to elsewhere and other times, is not mutually exclusive to the sense of belonging experienced amidst the daily life of east London. Nor does the multi-faceted meaning that Raheem ascribes to his brackish snack, impact on the dispositions of the stand's patrons, towards him. As was evident in the exchanges Raheem was involved in over my time hanging around the seafood stand, 'strangeness' never really became the thing to which he was reduced. Rather, he held the same position as any other member of the group that visit the stand over the course of a week; a group characterised, despite what some of its patrons say, not by nationality or ethnicity, but by its relative strangeness and an appreciation of seafood, a taste around which diverse stories, arguments, jokes and commentary are generously exchanged.

The relative openness of the local culture of which the seafood stand is part should not be a surprise. The ease with which people bring something new to local culture is entirely explicable when considering that, Raheem's contributions to local culture, the stories and meanings he brings to the seafood stand are, historically speaking, not anything new. He is, instead, simply amongst the most recent arrivals to the British Isles. From the regiment of north African Romans slurping oysters as they guarded Britannia at Hadrian's Wall, to the Manzes and the Tubbies cooking up cockney culture in twentieth century London – to have

48 "Iraqi River Carries Grotesque Cargo," *BBC*, July 17, 2007, sec. Middle East, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6902024.stm.

used local flavours as both economic and social resources within in local contexts but also, as doors to lost relationships and homes – from the Euphrates and Tigris to the Terranean sea.⁴⁹ At the level of the everyday, and beneath the cloak of their routine activity, individuals are able to constantly ascribe new meanings to old sensations, while at the same time, the local culture of port cities remain open to the reinterpretation and adaptation that strangers bring to them. Importantly in the context of east London, the constant bilateral traffic between both local culture and individual biographies is a socio-genetic process that endures, remarkably, despite the sporadic propagation of narratives that attempt to convert sensory identification with locality into exclusive nationalist sentiment.

Conclusion

What we eat, the flavours we are drawn to, which we crave, which we miss when they are gone, and those that we avoid, are integral to our sense of who we are, and they can define what this ‘we’ is in distinction to a ‘them’. However, while geneticists argue that a sweet tooth might even be in the blood, and conferred through birth, there is little evidence of any connection between blood and the localised senses of taste that an individual has.⁵⁰ Local tastes are, unsurprisingly, conferred by local culture. Yet, as the previous chapter has sought to demonstrate, the routes out of which local culture grows are often far more extensive, and globe spanning, than most understandings of locality would allow for. Despite the transnational links that are made through the body and its sensuous attachments, who we actually think we are, the sense of self we articulate through words and the meaning we

49 Large numbers of oyster shells have been found on this site, seemingly discarded by legions working on or guarding Hadrian’s wall, a site at which Richard Benjamin notes, was home to a unit of North African, Moorish Roman Soldiers, *Numerus Maurorum Auelianorum*. See: Jessie Mothersole, *Hadrian’s Wall* (Oxford: The Bodley Head, 1926), 92. Richard Benjamin, ‘Black Wall’, *Archaeology Magazine*, Issue 77, July 2004. Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1984), 1.

50 Marianna Max et al., “Tas1r3, Encoding a New Candidate Taste Receptor,” *Nature Genetics* 28, no. 1 (May 2001): 58-63.

attribute to gustatory sensations, is also often contingent on the dominant narrative through which the culture in which we consume is understood. It is for such reasons that some of the stand's patrons, seduced by xenophobic, insular narratives, understand their essential, local culture, as under threat from globalisation, and occasionally make their taste a marker of exclusive national belonging.

Of course, there is little doubting the extent to which the planetary span of modernity has accelerated and intensified cross-cultural traffic, and that this traffic has heavily impacted the sphere of flavour and taste, detaching culinary culture from fixed space. Yet despite the anxiety about these 'novel' processes that characterises contemporary debates about migration, globalisation and local identity, a glance at the evolution of London's culinary life over the *long durée* suggests such traffic is not actually anything new. Rather, the impact of empires, of intra-European migration as well as more global traffic, is in evidence across two thousand years of the city's history, and manifest in the most 'local' of culinary practices.

While the transnational nature of cultural formation in east London is not necessarily novel, neither, of course, is the tendency to mistake the experience of local culture, the myopic experience derived from within one, two, or even ten generations, for an experience of a timeless local essence. Accordingly, in one way or another, seafood has been important to the articulation of a local identity in London for several centuries. However, what does seem relatively novel is the tendency for explicitly exclusive and nationalist forms of affiliation to piggy back on sensuous attachments to distinctly local forms of culture. That is, what have evolved relatively recently over the course of the last two centuries, are narratives that convert a taste for the layered cultural and material sediments of a given *terroir*, into a feeling of insular national belonging. While visitors to the stand such as Raheem are thankfully not subject to

such xenophobia, the tendency is evident in the angry taxi drivers' sense of a congenital attachment to jellied eels, as well as the stall owners' melancholic interpretations of his trades demise with which the chapter opened. In both instances both the consumer and the essences she consumes are framed as being 'salt of the earth,' increasingly polluted by the spice coming from elsewhere.

Phil Cohen relates the emergence of this possessive, exclusive and territorial way of 'making sense' of East End culture to the modern production of an imagined 'island race' that is master of its shores and waters. However, drawing on the specific arguments forwarded by Cohen, and Eric Hobsbawm's more general thesis, far from attending to any reality, this interpretation appears largely to be the product of fictions that proliferated throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵¹ East London was particularly important to these fictions. In the first instance, the figure of the 'cockney' was reinvented, and turned from a figure of derision into a protagonist, pitted first against the threat of 'immigrants' arriving at London's ports and stations. Later, in the mid twentieth century, the figure of the cockney was wheeled out again, this time for a performance of the nation threatened by material destruction from above by 'foreign forces'.

In that a way of making sense of everyday identifications is shaped by a particular set of discursive composites, we can confirm Homi Bhabha's account of ethnic identity as ultimately a narrative 'achievement':⁵² In this instance the achievement is the reduction of a meshwork of trajectories and flows, to a story about an island, its hermetic seal bravely defended by the salt of the earth. It is difficult however, to call this impoverished way of 'making sense' an

51 Phil Cohen, *The Last Island* (Dagenham: Centre for New Ethnicities Research, 1998), 7.
Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

52 Homi K Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990).

‘achievement’ in any other sense than that of an optical, olfactory, tactile, gustatory and auditory illusion. Such ‘achievements’ are not insignificant: The provision of such a narratives, are, ironically, highly implicated in the exodus of Itzko Brenner – the original Tubby Isaac – to New York.⁵³

Yet alongside what others might say of the seafood stand, and what it might *say* of itself, within the everyday culture of which it is part, the real ‘achievement’ lies in the sustenance of a social form which has as its basis an enduring amenability to difference, reinterpretation and adaptation.

Above I have traced several histories, foregrounding the cross-cultural trajectories that thread through the mesh of the local culture of which the seafood stand is part. Through applying a historical attention to the biography of a taste, I have attempted to offer an alternative frame for the interpretation of local taste and culture, than the territorial narrative with which the chapter opened. Ultimately the histories above are rendered as an attempt to help make this cross-cultural history literally tangible, and tastable; to decode the overcoding of sensory experience by nationalist narratives, revealing the analogies between the ‘multicultural’ spaces of a global city’s street market discussed in the previous chapter, and the ‘indigenous culture’ of east London sampled here. Along with the histories of the sensoria and sensibilities excavated from the poly-aromatic fog of Ridley Road Market in the previous chapter, I would argue that the cross-cultural sensory exchanges and collaborations detailed above are, despite obvious differences, all partly analogous in their relationship with local culture. Turning the analysis towards noses and taste-buds, it is possible to ‘sense’ in each instance, how a stranger

⁵³ Tubby’s move to New York was, according to his surviving relatives, spurred by his desire not to have his two sons conscripted into the armed forces, but is also entirely relatable to the growth in local fascism. Ironically, the stall was eventually able to do relatively well in the decades immediately following the Second World War, in part perhaps, because two wars of personnel-heavy conflict of sea-borne conflict had put many others working at either end of the supply chain, from fishermen to costers, out of business, allowing a handful of seafood businesses to eventually capitalise and expand.

adds to the continual mutations accruing within the molecular composition of the local culture, literally altering its flavour, its aroma, its texture, without changing its essence, which remains an amenability to difference.

It is not, however, just the seafood stand, or the poly-aromatic street market that hosts so many cultural cross-roads. It is easy to forget that practically every flavour combination and taste for it, within the culture of cities such as London, was cooked up between strangers – from the national staple of fish and chips (a Franco-Sephardic urban fusion food), to the hyperbolised hybridity of chicken tikka masala, much of what was once strange to the British Isle's shores has become integrated into 'native' culture and creolised in the process.⁵⁴ Of course, some times spicing up is simply that: the superficial addition of a strange flavour to a concoction, to reassert the difference between the strange and the familiar. However, the encounter with strangeness also often culminates in a great deal more than the title of Panikos Panayi's *'Spicing Up Britain'* would suggest. More than simply reflecting the recent addition of the foreignness to a national culinary culture, the entire gustatory history of east London, points towards the mongrel histories within 'national' culture itself.

⁵⁴ For details on the cultural crossroads that resulted in the peculiar combination of Andean tubers fried French-style, with the Sephardic staple of *pescado frito* see: John K. Walton, *Fish and Chips and the British Working Class, 1870-1940* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000).

The Senses and Social Formation

From the commingling clouds of incense, bagel dough, soap and cardamon at a busy street market, to the piscine shroud that covers plastic trays of wobbly seafood, the preceding chapters have presented urban spaces rich in olfactory and gustatory sensations. As stated at the outset, this multisensory attention has been developed in an attempt to foreground aspects of urban experience normally muted within sociological accounts of urban environments, and are prone to ocular-centrism and disembodied abstraction. However, while developing a multisensory account of urban forms has been a key motivation of this intervention, it has not constituted an end in itself. Rather, the multisensory attention deployed in the ethnographic field, and the sensory detail through which the ethnography has been rendered, have had a very specific purpose. By bringing the background ‘texture’ of everyday life to the foreground of the analysis, the previous chapters have facilitated insights into the role that everyday sensoria, and the barely conscious experience of them, play within urban-social formation. In doing so, it has aimed to show how different and more nuanced sociological understandings of class, race, multicultural, power, space, locality and globalisation might be, if we consider not only their appearance, but also their texture, aroma and flavour.

The first two chapters sought to explore the interaction between the senses and social formation by explicating the relationship between the minutiae of everyday distaste, and processes of social stratification. Therein I argued that social strata were reproduced through work done by all of the senses, with the sense of smell, taste in particular, habituated to produce boundaries between life worlds. The two chapters that followed, however, argued that as well as ossifying certain forms of social strata, everyday sensory experiences hosted

conjunctions between seemingly distinct life worlds. The senses of smell and taste in particular, I argued, are involved in the smudging socio-sensory of forms of distinction, and deeply implicated in processes of de-stratification through which the production of new forms of identification and affiliation arise. Accordingly what follows is an attempt to explicate further how the everyday sensory experiences detailed previously can be involved in what appear to be paradoxical social process. This will be followed with a conclusive reflection on the relationship between sensory research methods and the types of sociology that they open up. First, however, a summary of the previous empirical chapters and their key conclusions.

Digest

Following an introduction to the locations featured in this study, as well as the methods deployed while hanging around them, chapter three initiated key empirical component of this thesis with a sustained focus on the opaque wobbling jelly and the small chunks of boiled eel that it encases. In its attention to the contortions on the faces of people, passing behind the patrons of Tubby Isaac's seafood stand, chapter three theorised the relationship between disgust, distaste and the reproduction of classificatory systems. Drawing on Mary Douglas's concept of 'dirt' and Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection, it sought to demonstrate that aversions to consuming seafood on the streets of east London, have less to do with any objective, biological rationale, than with the classificatory systems and lay taxonomies that the seafood stand disturbed.¹ Some of these classificatory systems were largely asocial; the jelly that was neither solid nor liquid, the eel neither visibly snake nor fish. However, these partly asocial senses of 'boundary disturbance' combined with the contravention of more explicitly social classificatory systems to over determine visceral aversion to the seafood stand. In certain

¹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002).
Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

cases, for instance, the encounter of the stand's aromas and flavours in the nose or mouth clearly disturbed the invisible boundary demarcated by the senses, between the 'proper' 'respectable' middle-class female body, and the 'licentious,' 'heterosocial' back streets of east London.² Accordingly, as with Douglas's dirt, squeamish experiences of the stand's maritime miasma were credited with shoring up culturally specific sensibilities, and in doing so reproducing – and spatialising – boundaries between gender and class-inflected cultures.

Chapter four turned away from the direct observation of squirms *in situ* and instead focused on narratives through which a particular space was represented, to reveal the overarching nightmares and anxieties that lie underneath the way the teller experiences the world. It also argued that spatial narratives not only reflect experience, but feed back into an individual's experience of space and inform the meaning given to it by others. Through a selection of historical and contemporary narratives about Ridley Road the chapter demonstrated how the smells and flavour of the market place had been narratively framed, then experienced, as a threat to particular conceptions of race and culture. These narratives ranged from mid-twentieth-century fascist interpretations of the 'biological' 'racial threat' posed by the Jewish market, through to fear laden late-twentieth-century accounts of cultural degradation as the market metamorphosed into a destination for Caribbean migrants. This history of racialised disgust concluded with present-day anxieties regarding the West African 'essence' of the globalised market place.

In particular the chapter argued that, while the skin colour or physiognomy of the market's users were, according to the protocols of newly acquired anti-racist 'colour blindness,' no longer important to the ways in which the market and its users were classified, the smell and

²Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

tastes of the market remained central to discriminatory ways of making sense of the space and its users. Drawing on narratives about the market, I argued that, particular ways of making sense of it, could be understood as arising out of the sensuous sediments of colonial and eugenicist modes of power: modes of power that made significant investments in the senses. In short, I argued that a lack of attention to the discriminatory role of ‘the other senses’ leaves them amenable to remobilisation by new forms of racism and exclusion through which pernicious taxonomies of humanity are, often unwittingly, reproduced.

This chapter, combined with the preceding chapters’ account of the relationship between the senses and class culture that constituted the first section of the thesis, detailed the role of the senses in producing, reproducing and spatialising various forms of social segmentation. As much, however, as these chapters can be seen to demonstrate the role of the senses in shoring up largely abstract forms of classification, as I concluded in chapter three, the consequences are very real for those being labelled as symbolically dirty; a designation that often confines particular individuals to contexts in which *real* dirt and danger is prevalent.

Having outlined the role that the senses play within urban social formations and the spatialisation of social strata in chapters three and four, the section that followed sought to delve into the ambience of the spaces previously subjected to squirms, nods and winks. Returning to a more ethnographic mode of analysis, chapter five opened with a detailed portrayal of the aromatic ambience of Ridley Road. Starting with an inventory of the ‘essences’ that colour the air of the street market, the chapter presented a portrait of the overlapping waves of migrants who have made a home in east London. Drawing on the numerous flavours and aromas of the market, the chapter posited the importance of taste-buds and noses to the coalescence of diasporic social forms. The smells and flavours of the

market, I argued, afforded its diverse users with sensations that make everyday life in a context potentially hostile to newcomers, entirely habitable. In this respect, the olfactory inventory leant towards a portrait of a space that is home to numerous, but separate cultural essences, around which distinct dislocated ‘ethnic’ cultures were able to reform. The vapourous and ephemeral smells and flavours of the multicultural market place, in certain senses, could be understood as anchors for identity and tradition, in a context wherein much of life is otherwise ‘melting into air’. Certainly there is a partial truth in this assertion, and the importance of smells and tastes to the diasporic rekindling of cultures fragmented by modernity has been well discussed by the likes of Nadia Seremetakis and David Sutton.³ However, through a sensory biography of one of the market’s traders, and an attention honed on cross-cultural artefacts within the market, the chapter also recognised something quite different occurring simultaneously to the homemaking efforts of distinct migrant groups. The chapter argued that far from sustaining the reproduction of distinct cultural groups, the aromas and flavours of the market – commingled by the open air breeze – also facilitated the production of the market users’ cross-cultural sensibilities. Rather than simply being central to the production of various forms of exiled ethnic identities, the chapter posited the importance of the olfactory and gustatory urban experiences, to the production of the trans-national affinities.

In conclusion the chapter argued that the everyday multiculturalism of the market, is far from the inevitable result of inter-cultural contact and osmosis. Rather, while the intermingling of previously distinct sensory worlds on the breeze of the open-air market potentialise the development of new social formations, the actualisation of these social forms is contingent on other factors. Drawing on Dick Hobb’s account of entrepreneurs in the East End, the chapter

³ David Evan Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001).
Nadia Seremetakis, *The Senses Still* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

argued that the existence of economic migrants and refugees within the city, often cut-off from the sustenance of family and culture, necessitates cross-cultural modes of association and affiliation through which they can survive.⁴ The result is the actualisation of a peculiarly local form of everyday multiculturalism, of which the jerk chicken bagel is emblematic. Importantly, far from being simply a source of nutrition and an economically determined ‘taste of necessity,’ the taste of and a taste *for* such morsels serves to symbolically undermine the essentialist forms of categorisation through which an individual’s place within the political economy of the city is ‘traditionally’ allocated.

The previous chapter, chapter six, left the myriad mingling sensoria and sensibilities of Ridley Road, and returned to the dislocated maritime miasma of Tubby Isaac’s seafood stand at Petticoat Lane. Again the chapter drew on ethnographic encounters around the seafood stand for its core material. However, on this occasion, the chapter focused more on encounters with the seafood stand’s patrons rather than its squeamish detractors. As was the case with the distaste expressed for the stand, the chapter initially stressed the importance of a taste for its flavours, to the formation and stratification of exclusive modes of identification and community. More precisely it sought to demonstrate how a taste *for* morsels such as the salty and earthy eels, was interpreted by some as a measure of affiliation to a national ‘island race,’ of which the ‘salt of the earth,’ ‘white-working-class cockney’ provides a figurative backbone. Accompanying this framing of a particular ‘taste *for*’ eels as a measure of group membership, was a tendency to relate the decline of seafood consumption in the East End, with the encroaching ‘foreignness’ manifest in globalising, cosmopolitan London.

⁴ Dick Hobbs, *Doing the Business* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

In many respects, it seemed that the everyday meaning attributed to these distinctly local tastes as markers of membership to a community now under threat, finds validation in the reciprocal squirms of the East End's cosmopolitan gentrifiers (detailed in chapter three). Such meanings also find validation in a range of sociological, geographical and historical literature that seeks to elaborate on the distinction between the disjunctive, hybrid culture of the global present, and the mimetically reproduced local cultures of the past. However, the central aim of the chapter was to ultimately develop a critique of the binary between the essential old city, and the hybridised, multicultural global city, that features so prominently in both celebratory and condemnatory narratives about contemporary London.

Accordingly, within that chapter, the same sensory-historical attention that was applied to the conspicuously transcultural sensibilities of Ridley Road Market's users was applied to the taste for seafood in the East End. As the biography of the taste for this food suggests, while being a flavour that is essentially *of* the Thames estuary, a taste *for* jellied eels has analogous origins to transnational sensibilities in operation at the conspicuously multicultural, Ridley Road Market. As the chapter went on to argue, both a taste for the jerk chicken bagel, and jellied eels sprinkled with chilli vinegar, arises out of an assemblage of colonial conquest, transnational mercantilism, technological revolution and cross-cultural literacy necessitated by life in the poorest regions of a port city. Moreover, rather than these cross-cultural connections being peculiar to the distant past of the seafood stand, the chapter also traced the enduring transnational affiliations forged through the taste for the seafood stand *today*. Drawing on the biographies of the stand's patrons, the chapter suggested how one individual's the taste for the sea, was integral to the both the establishment, and everyday maintenance, of transnational forms of association. That is, the flavours of the stand provided a sense of connection not only to the *terroir* of east London, but also simultaneously to the Terranean sea, the Tigris and the

Euphrates, exemplifying the extent to which flavour can at once provide bridges to elsewhere, as well as an anchors in locality.

Sensory Paradoxes

To reiterate, the preceding chapters can be separated into two sections. The first foregrounds the manner in which the senses – the faculties of smell and flavour in particular – are inculcated in the reproduction of pre-existent forms of social distinction, and the spatialisation of social strata in urban environments. Despite the seemingly personal nature of individual experiences of taste, disgust and distaste, the chapters argue that everyday sensory experiences articulate the boundaries between various forms of social distinction. In doing so, the senses are involved in the production of distinct, spatialised social groups, as well as reproducing asymmetrical distributions of power. The second section argued that, while they are integral to the ossification of social strata, olfactory and gustatory experiences are also deeply involved in cross-cultural dialogues through which boundaries are smudged, the dissolution of social distinctions take place, and through which new social forms emerge. Accordingly, the two sections together can be seen as tracing the relationship of everyday sensory experiences to either side of what Les Back refers to as “the metropolitan paradox.” As Back notes, “within Europe’s major conurbations, complex and exhilarating forms of transcultural production exist simultaneously with the most extreme forms of violence and racism.”⁵ Yet despite the apparent self-evidence of this paradox within the everyday life of many urban contexts, there remains a paucity of theory with which explain it. How in one context, does the sensate body allow changes to the culture that lives through it, while at

⁵ Les Back, *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 7.

others mobilising the senses to guard and reproduce the forms of social distinction upon which it depends?

In some respects, this thesis, by dealing with these two facets of urban social formation separately, has bordered on replicating the binary through which these are seen as mutually exclusive socio-sensory process. Chapter six did, however, start to shed light on how these two paradoxical processes relate to each other. Therein, while excavating the biography of a taste *for* the Thames' essences, the chapter demonstrated how this particular 'taste', which arises out of the East End's historical hospitality to difference, is made to be a measure of exclusive, territorial, nationalist forms of identification. This conversion, from an artefact of cross-cultural interaction, to a symbol of exclusive affiliation, is done, the chapter argued, through the flavour's incorporation into the narrative mythology of an 'essential national community'. More precisely, the chapter drew on a Deleuzian concept to suggest that the minuscule cross-roads of trajectories that make up the alimentary customs of East End culture, are 'overcoded' according to the imperative of nationalist modalities of power. In particular, through the development of a story with key figures (the cockney and the alien) that fitted with the imperatives of power in modern Britain. This story, like the stories about the "alien horrors" of Ridley Road market discussed in chapter four, serves to educate the senses and modulate attention so as to create a sense of 'them' and 'us' out of what was previously a peculiarly transnational yet local 'we'.

Accordingly the chapter contains within it, a way in which to theorise how the two sides of the 'metropolitan paradox' relate to each other. What follows below is an attempt to carry the task initiated in chapter six conclusively forwards into a more general theory of the relationship between sensory experience and the paradoxes of social formation: an attempt to summarise

how open-ended social forms, with an amenability to difference at their core, are closed off through the the mobilisation of particular forms of sensibility. However, at the same time, what follows also aims to summarise how new social forms are able to emerge out of seemingly insular sensibilities and exclusive forms of identification. This will be illustrated with one last empirical example, extracted from the very early period of the ethnography on which this thesis is based. Before introducing this illustration, however, I want to undertake some further excavation of theoretical concepts that have been coalescing beneath the previous chapters, if only occasionally explicitly referenced within them.

The Senses, Subjects and Subjugation

The work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari is remarkable for a great many reasons, not least for the abundance of neologisms that the authors develop in order to escape the intractable to and fro of previous either/or debates; of which the essentialist/hybrid accounts of identity, characterised by the metropolitan paradox might be counted as one.

Unfortunately, despite their inventiveness, many of the conceptual tools the pair developed are generally too unwieldy for use in the practice of ethnography.⁶ There are, however a clutch of devices from within their work that find a special utility when distilling the relationship between the senses and the paradoxes of urban forms of identity and affiliation. In particular, two pairs of interrelated theories of ‘group formation’: First the “extensive multiplicity” or “subjugated group”, and second, the “intensive multiplicity” or “subject-group.”⁷ As I will demonstrate below, these concepts have been quietly at work throughout the preceding analysis. Moreover, upon inspection, they provide ways of moving beyond the familiar

6 Perhaps the greatest barrier to the use of the pair’s theories in ethnography arises from the fact that the protocols and dogmas of ethnography, which require varying degrees of translation and description, constantly risks reproducing the very binary of reality and representation that Deleuzian theses take as their *raison d’être* to critique.

7 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2003), 348.

intractable theories of identity, and reveal how two paradoxical forms of social formation and identification not only co-exist, but also feed off one and other.

First, a brief outline of what Deleuze and Guattari mean by an ‘extensive multiplicity’. In less abstract language than that used by Deleuze and Guattari, Clare Colebrook summarises their conception of the extensive multiplicity in the following way:

“If I have an extended collection of red objects, I can add or subtract one or more things, and still have a set of red objects. This is an extensive multiplicity. The difference in quantity does not change the nature of the set because I am measuring quantity by a standard unit.”⁸

Importantly, within an extensive multiplicity, there is an external measure through which the group is defined, to which it is ‘subjugated’: hence the use of the term “subjugated group” to describe extensive multiplicities.⁹ Colebrook’s ‘red objects’ analogy is particularly useful in understanding the relationship between these formations, and the senses. As demonstrated in chapters three and four, certain types of exclusive group formation necessitate that the individual understand and speak a particular sensory language: that they smell, sound and look a particular way and that they desire specific sensations over others. Perhaps most importantly, the ‘group’ is upheld by the imperative that its members they expel from their acculturated bodies sensoria that threaten the internal consistency of the group and its unifying culture. We see this explicitly in the previous chapter in which a taste for jellied eels and East End seafood is taken by some of the stand’s patrons as an external measure of membership to the ‘authentic white working-class’ East End. At the same time, it is taken by

⁸ Claire Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 59.

⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2003), 248.

others, the East End's new gentrifiers in particular, as a potential threat to the consistency of their respectable 'cosmopolitan' culture.

In this sense, the formation of 'extensive multiplicities' or 'subjugated groups' is partially analogous to what Julia Kristeva theorises through the concept of 'abjection,' what Mary Douglas theorises through her definition of 'dirt,' and what Bourdieu theorises when describing the role of 'taste' and 'distaste' within processes of social stratification. When Kristeva writes that the "abject and abjection are my safe guards, the primers of my culture..."¹⁰ or when Douglas writes that dirt is simply "matter out of place,"¹¹ or when Bourdieu describes bourgeois distaste for specific forms of low 'culture,' each is theorising group and identity formation through a sensitivity to external measures: a constellation of textures, sounds, smells and flavours. This sensitivity to certain predicates of group membership occurs simultaneously to the expulsion of sensoria and sensibilities that do not fit the inherited sensory repertoires of a particular culture which would corrode the consistency of the group or identity by its admission. So in this respect many respects, Kristeva, Douglas, and to an extent Bourdieu all help to theorise the development of exclusive forms of grouping or community in relation to the senses.

Importantly, however, none of the work by the authors referenced above is really able to adequately explain the complexities and everyday border crossings peculiar to urban multiculturalism. That is, each naturalises processes through which social strata are sensorially produced, and posits regimes of taste and distaste as integral to the production of 'social order'. For Mary Douglas in particular, whose thesis, like Bourdieu, draws heavily on the

10 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 44.

11 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), 44.

Durkheimian and Maussian assumption that ‘to be human is to categorise’, all society appears coextensive with an aesthetic sensibility through which hierarchical orders and taxonomies are maintained.¹²

Of course, it is certainly true that a form of order and hierarchy is reproduced through regimes of taste and distaste. In chapter four, for instance, we saw how the figure of the bushmeat eater, like the cannibal, was experienced as existing somewhere between Eurocentric figures of the human, and the bestial. In this instance, the revulsion directed at the market to which this figure was imputed, served to reproduce and spatialise a pernicious hierarchy of humanity, a race and class-inflected hierarchy integral to the political economy of the city. What we learn from the chapters that followed this first section, however, is that everyday existence in the inner confines of an urban conurbation entails numerous instances in which pernicious and divisive categories are destabilised with little loss of ‘order’ within that context, or loss of psychological equilibrium for those involved.

Across both the *long durée* of gustatory and olfactory history of London, but also within the microscopy of the contemporary everyday, we see that the internal consistency of the ‘subjugated’ grouping is frequently broken down by the inclusion of ‘strangeness’ – a smell, a flavour, a texture, or a way of interpreting the world, that is not initially of the group or the individuals that comprise it, yet which does not precipitate closing the ‘group’ or ‘body’ up again with either an expulsive squirm or the ascription of exoticising forms of meaning. Difference it seems, in many instances, is treated as a banal fact of everyday life.

¹² Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Durkheim/Mauss: Primitive Classification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

In this respect, it is worth considering the multiplicities and groups that the “extensive” and “subjugated” multiplicity are contrasted against. For Deleuze and Guattari, the “extensive multiplicity”, or “subjugated” group, exists in distinction to “intensive multiplicities” and “subject groups.” Rather than being a countable set of red objects, “subject groups” are characterised by the fact that their composition “alters with each addition or subtraction.”¹³ That is, the formation of “subject group” or “intensive multiplicity” is not dependent on an ‘external measure’ or the adherence to a particular set of sounds, smells, textures, or flavours, for instance. On the contrary, the subject group is defined by the creative coming together of this “and” this “and” this. As Deleuze and Guattari write, “what characterises the [subject group, or the intensive multiplicity] is neither the set nor its elements; rather it is the *connection*, the ‘and’ produced between elements”, which brings about changes to the “group.”¹⁴ As the previous chapters have demonstrated such formations can be understood as integral to the wider networks of affinity and acquaintance that characterise the everyday multicultural life in and around spaces such as an east London street market.¹⁵

At the individual level, for instance consider the affinities and identifications articulated by John, whose outward appearance is that of a salt of the earth ‘cockney,’ but whose everyday existence is inflected through the connections he forged with that which was not initially ‘of his own culture’. Or more explicitly, recall the biographical details offered by Dickson; details of the manner in which his sensibility and affinities were assembled, quite literally through a process of putting this “and” this “and” this together: a process that crystallises in his

13 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 519.

14 Ibid. 519.

15 Elsewhere Deleuze and Guattari refer to the ‘intensive multiplicity’ as being characterized by a “rhizomatic” organisational structure, a form of affiliation that bears no resemblance to hierarchical forms of power. The figure of the rhizome has been widely taken up in much sociological literature over the last two decades. While the figure of the rhizome has significant analytical value, the geometrical analogy of the intensive multiplicity has been chosen over the rhizome here, partly for the clarity of the concept, and partly because it carries less of the baggage picked up by the “rhizome” over recent decades. For more see: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 3.

production of poly-aromatic cross-cultural soaps and lotions, and is reflected in the ambience of the market of which they are part. Even if not occurring at a level that achieves articulation in ‘discursive consciousness’, or results in self-identification with ‘hybridity’, such cross-cultural connections and the social formations that they sustain, have radical implications for ‘local culture’. Through a deeper understanding of such processes, the local culture of East London can be defined, not by its residents’ adherence to a set of external measures, but by its amenability to difference, the connections between ‘this,’ and ‘that’. Of course, the ‘this and that’ that come together in the multi-culture of an east London street market, is perhaps very different from that which develops across other urban conurbations, or even other locales within London. In this sense, there remains a peculiarly local culture. Yet it is not a culture that any one group or individual can lay claim to, and it is a local culture forged out of global connection and which is continually amenable to new additions.

However, as was argued in chapter five, this sensorially mediated production of radical new forms of ‘being together,’ is far from given. Rather there seem to be certain conditions in which genuinely cross-cultural forms of association develop out of previously exclusive forms of association. What then are the conditions under which such dynamic social formations develop?

Social Formation, Cramped Space and The Senses

It is telling that it is in contexts such as London’s East End that the emergence of ‘new urban ethnicities’ and transcultural modes of belonging appear to be at their most prolific. Drawing explicitly on Deleuze and Guattari’s *oeuvre*, Nicholas Thorburn argues that creative, and potentially radical, new forms of identification and affiliation typical of the ‘subject group’ or

'intensive multiplicity' generally "begin not in a space of self-determined subjective plenitude and autonomy, but in 'cramped space'."¹⁶ Literally more cramped than any other part of London, historically the first destination of the city's newest migrants and contemporaneously bisected by countless cross-roads of fibre optics, flight paths, rail lines and roads, east London provides incredibly fertile soil for the flourishing of new social forms.¹⁷ In such literally cramped spaces, populated by an unusual density of 'strangers' – living cut-off from the ties of family and tradition – new cultural creations, and the augmentations of old ones, are a banal 'everyday' occurrence. However, while the 'crampedness' produced via the movement of congested traffic in people, things and codes through London's East End provides a particularly fertile context for transcultural formations, it is by no means the only such space on the planet. Torrents, eddies and trickles of heterogenous bodies sensoria and sensibility meet in innumerable combinations at locales across the planet, often beneath the everyday habits of places carved by previous currents, and sedimented with cross cultural socio-sensory deposits. Port cities are emblematic of such meeting places. However with the 'becoming-urban' of the planet, virtually all space facilitates such formations.

Yet despite innumerable new technologies of exchange and communication, it is still, in many instances, the peculiar form of the 'open-air street market', that crystalises the conditions of crampedness most emphatically, and most tangibly facilitates the open-ended social formations through the senses of its users. However, by 'markets' here, I mean to distinguish, as Manuel Delanda does, between first: the sensorially homogenised, hierarchically organised world of trading between transnational corporations; and second the literal coming together of heterogenous people, commodities, smells, flavours, sounds and textures on a daily or

16 Nicholas Thoburn, *Deleuze, Marx and Politics* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), 22.

17 *London, Borough by Population Density*, Office of National Statistics <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1078>, accessed April 2009.

weekly basis in a communal space.¹⁸ ‘Regulated’ by decentralised forms of organisation, characterised by their flexibility and openness to the city and its elements, it is particularly this latter type of market, rather than their unfortunate namesake, that are most readily able to facilitate new forms of association and identification, prizing open hermetically sealed life worlds through material interaction and exchange.¹⁹ Both the literal and metaphorical osmosis between worlds that occurs in such places is particularly tangible in the multisensory landscape of the street market, tastable in the multitude of essences inhaled and exhaled through the market users lungs, edible in the jerk chicken bagel, and observable as it forms when drops of homemade Nigerian fish sauce drip on to Whitstable cockles. These are the specific flavour of the transnationally inflected local culture of the East London street market, and each globalised locale has its own flavours. What unites such sites, is the extent to which their open-ended amenability to difference provides resources for existence in an increasingly cramped world.

Exclusivist Politics, ‘The Market’ and The Senses

Simultaneously however, on the other side the creative, novel, and potentially radical forms of identification forged in part through the senses, are also readily closed off and rendered into the service of exclusive forms of identity and community. We see this process quite plainly in chapter six. Therein the tangled transcultural biography of a particular taste *for* jellied eels and oysters is swept under the carpet of a nationalist narrative that attempts to equate the essential taste *of* London, with an essential, indigenous taste *for* it. The effects of this historical revisionism and its impact on local sensibilities crystallises in the xenophobia that is often a

18 Manuel DeLanda, ‘The Geology of Morals: A Neomaterialist Interpretation’ presented at *Virtual Futures 95*, Conference, Warwick University, UK, 26 May, 1995.

19 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2003), 382.

part of the everyday banter performed around the seafood stand. Attempts to convert the open-ended culture of the East End into a constellation of distinct, incompatible essences, groups, are also evident in the history presented in chapter four. Therein, as the chapter argued, the propagation of particular narratives of the market by a century-long chain of fascists, nationalists and banal racists, converting the excitement stimulated by the market's continually changing sense-scape into a gut feeling for the limits of 'race'.

Such moments in the history of London testify to the fact that periodically, the heterogenous composition of British culture, and that of London in particular, is subject to attempts to make certain 'tastes' and sensibilities, markers of membership or exclusion. Therein, modes of association that once opened up group formation through sensuous experience,"..clos[e] up again... re-establishing interior limits," of a 'subjugated group'.²⁰ In these instances, the efforts to produce particular sensory identifiers of group membership stem from within the core of political and military machinery.

It is not, however, only the institutions of exclusivist nationalist politics that make such investments in the senses. Other institutions have also become deeply implicated in the production of particular forms of sensibility, and the stratification of sociality through the senses, as well as the distribution of sensoria with which to do so. I am thinking not least here of the other type of market to that which was previously mentioned, namely 'The Market': the hierarchically organised mechanism through which distinct yet internally homogenised social strata have been produced throughout the course of late modernity. Put simply, the colossal institutions of global capitalism also benefit from investments in the senses, and the reduction of intermingling life worlds into separate strata through them. Of course, the

²⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2003), 383.

investments made by exclusivist forms of politics are not necessarily a process apart from those made by global capitalism. We glanced at the synergy between the sensuous sediments of colonialism, ethnic exclusivism and global capitalism in chapter four. The chapter sought to demonstrate the drive to produce a profitable sensory landscape, tapping into the ‘cosmopolitan’ sensory preferences of global capital, often serves to over-code the ‘messy’ multicultural of everyday urban life; construing it as ‘essentially’ other, and beyond the edge of the cosmopolitan sensibility. Similar tendencies have been noted by Tim Edensnor in his account of the production of the ‘blandscape’ of the tourist enclave.²¹ In fact, the sensory investments made by the corporate institutions of global capitalism are by no means peculiar to the world of property development and tourism. Rather, as David Howes argues, they are ubiquitous, and are fueled by a secretive, highly manipulative, multibillion pound industry geared towards the production and reproduction of particular ways of seeing, smelling, touching and tasting.²² While the sensory investments of global capitalism are ongoing and pervasive, however, there are also sporadic episodes through which the state engages in concerted efforts are made to calibrate an entire city, or country’s senses, with the aim of producing a set of boundaries delimited by the senses. Such episodes are evident in events that I have not yet discussed, but which cast a shadow over the development of this thesis.

‘Trust Your Senses’?

I first started developing the proposal for this research project in the summer of 2005, while living, and working in the East End of London. In July of that summer, as I was winding up my employment and preparing for a return to the academy, bombs were detonated across the

²¹ Tim Edensnor, ‘Sensing Tourist Spaces’ in C. Minca and T. Oakes (eds) *Travels in Paradox: Remapping Tourism*, (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006)

²² David Howes, ‘Hyperesthesia, or, The Sensual Logic of Late Capitalism’ in Howes D. (ed.), *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005), 291.

London transport network by four ‘home-grown’ terrorists, killing fifty-six people. One of these bombs was in fact, detonated on the underground transport line literally a few hundred feet beneath Tubby Isaac’s Seafood stand. For a few days, crowds of international news crews clustered around the stand, filming men in wheezing biohazard suits going in and out of the underground station beside it.²³ Two weeks later, several more bombs failed to explode across London, again, one of which again appeared within the geographical coordinates of this study; on a bus in Shoreditch, right between the two sites I had earmarked for study in this ethnography.

Either detonating or failing to detonate in the most conspicuously diverse spaces of the city, it seemed that in many respects, the explosions were an attempt to literally ‘fragment’ the lived reality of everyday multiculturalism in east London. It was, in the end however, the municipal response to these explosions that threatened to de-emulsify the soup of everyday life in the city. As I started out on the ethnography, attempting to explore the relationship between the senses and social formation in east London, I generally chose to walk the mile and a half between the two locations I had selected for study. Occasionally however, when I did not have the energy or time to walk, I took the bus. It was on one of the bus rides I took early on in the ethnography, that I first noticed the signs starting to appear on buses and bus stops, urging Londoners to “trust” their “senses.” Like the American iWatch system that urges Americans to “report it” if they “see, hear or smell” “something suspicious,” the signs were part of a concerted institutional effort to calibrate the senses of the city’s inhabitants and visitors towards a negative sensitivity to difference.²⁴

23 Much to the owner’s chagrin, few actually bought anything from the stand, and police tape and cameras blocked access to it by regulars

24 *iWatch PSA 78second*, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkmRPJv5jZE&feature=youtube_gdata accessed 4th July 2010.



Trust Your Senses, circa 2006, photograph, Les Back.

What was actually meant as suspicious, in this instance, is not specified. One of the consequences that Brian Massumi attributes to the colour-coded ‘terror spectrum’ used in the United States is that, tapping into the networked nervous system of the public, without any explicit referent, leads to anxiety unfolding in any number of different directions.²⁵ In response to shifts from amber to red alert in the United States’ terror alert system, for instance, far from directing nervous anxiety at the states desired targets, “each body’s reaction,” Massumi writes, is left to be “determined largely by its already-acquired patterns of response.”

Indeed, in this instance, although nerves were jangled, there seemed to be very little consistency in the manner in which this heightened anxiety was expressed. However, there are a number of instances where definition of ‘suspicious’ was, in fact, all too predictable.

²⁵ “Jacked into the same modulation of feeling, bodies reacted in unison without necessarily acting alike. Their responses could, and did, take many forms. What they shared was the central nervousness. How it translated somatically varied body by body.” Brian Massumi, “Fear (The Spectrum Said),” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 13, no. 1 (3, 2005): 31-48.

Excavating the sensuous sediments of London colonial history, and following legitimating cues from popular media outlets, sensitivities to differences long since integrated into the everyday multiculturalism of the city were rekindled, in an attempt to assert the multisensory boundaries of a racist, insular national identity

As Les Back recounts, the renewed optical sensitivity to the ‘threat’ of difference, had serious consequences for both Mohammed Abdul Kahar and Jean Charles de Menezes, both of whom were shot and the latter ‘wrongfully killed,’ following the visual misrecognition of a threat. As Back also details, the recalibration of aural and optical sensitivity to the threat of difference resulted in Harraj “Rab” Mann being escorted from a flight by anti-terror officers, following his choice to listen to the punk anthem, “London’s Calling” in the presence of a xenophobic cabbie.²⁶ Such a heightened multi-sensitivity to threats to order, also had a very tangible effect on the contexts in which I was embarking on my ethnography, and on the sensory modalities I was selecting for study.

From 2005 onwards, and throughout the period of my research, every other time I entered Ridley Road with my voice recorder, camera and notebook, I passed a crowd of between four and ten police officers, accompanied by private ‘stop and search specialists,’ ensconced at the foot of the market. Indistinguishable in their hi-visibility jackets, the private contractors and police routinely rummaged latex-covered hands through the dusty bags of passing cyclists, the fluffy pockets of pedestrians, and the chocolate and soft-porn laden glove-boxes of passing van drivers.

²⁶ Les Back, *The Art of Listening* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 145.

In many respects, this itself was nothing especially new for Ridley Road. Between the late seventies and early eighties, simultaneous to the National Front activity mentioned in chapter four, officially sanctioned ‘stop and searches’ targeting the market’s black community were a regular occurrence, and served to exacerbate divisions and animosity between racially defined groups living in the area. While restrictions were eventually placed on racially profiled police stop and searches, amendments made to section 44 (2) of the 2000 Terrorism Act, following the attacks of 2005, enabled police to once again stop and search anyone, anywhere, randomly and without any rationale for suspicion across the entirety of London.²⁷ While police went to great efforts to produce statistics that suggested they were not discriminating, the searches were by no means random.²⁸ Trusting their senses, the police’s “already-acquired patterns of response” to ‘the threat’ were obvious. In short, the conspicuously hybridised multiculturalism of Ridley Road Market apparently ‘felt’ like the ideal place to extend the definition of ‘terror’ to the sensations generated by the sounds, smells, flavours and gestures of market. Here the relationship between the vertiginous heterogeneity of inner-city urban cultures and exclusive forms of affiliation is quite explicit. In this instance, it is first and foremost, the development of a particular narrative, full of figurative and imagery language, that modulates the meaning ascribed to sensory experience, and converts particular sensoria into boundaries between exclusive identities.

Yet it must be noted that over the last five years, as is the case over the history of the city in general, simultaneous to the distribution of an impoverished narrative with which to wax over the knotted braids of urban culture, simultaneous to consistent attempts to forestall further ‘connections’ with exclusive introspection, novel forms of transcultural sociality continue to

²⁷ The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 made substantial suspicion or exceptional circumstances a necessity for all stop and searches leading to significant reductions in stop and searches.
“Terrorism Act Section 44 (2)” http://www.met.police.uk/foi/pdfs/policies_stop_and_search_s44_tact_2000_sop.pdf .

²⁸ “Police Stops ‘Target Minorities’,” *BBC*, March 15, 2010, sec. UK, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8567528.stm>.

emerge. As the smudging of sensoria and sensibility detailed previously attest to, despite what people might say of themselves and despite the impoverished historical narratives that they identify with, the bodies of those living the everyday life of the city continue to facilitate some of the most remarkable cross-cultural connections. Given that little of this ‘connection’ occurs at the level of ‘discursive consciousness’, instead taking place within the sensuous ambience of everyday experience, we can, it seems, in many instances still ‘trust our senses’: Trust the nose, taste-buds and gut feelings, not necessarily to ‘root out’ difference and to demarcate segregated social spaces, but to continue to forging cross-cultural collaborations and to thwart attempts to carve humanity into discrete forms.

Of course, not all novel cross-cultural social formations necessarily flourish in the soil of the conurbation. Many, however, evidently do bloom, drawing substantial nutrition from the sensuous sediments deposited by past flows of people and culture through the *terroir* of a given locale. Moreover, they in turn, while qualitatively changing both the sensoria and sensibilities that characterise a given locality, they in turn also provide the soil for future formations. As the everyday life of spaces such as Ridley Road testify to, certain forms of everyday multiculturalism find incredible viability within the cramped conditions of the contemporary city. At the very least, the world of halal hotdogs, jerk chicken bagels, fish and chips present hypotheses for making life in our urbanised global future far more hospitable, than the alternative retreat into hermetic life worlds, policed by hyper sensitive nervous systems. It is for these reasons; for both the investments made by power, in our bodies, through the senses, but also the resistance to that power and the human potential realised through sensuous experiences, that we need to ‘come to our senses’.

Coming to Our Senses

By coming to our senses, I mean to infer a process that moves in two directions, and is relevant to both sociological practice as well as to individuals and institutions engaged in the world around them. The first part of ‘coming to our senses’ is about the modes of attention we deploy when reflexively engaging in the world. That is, coming to our senses, as exemplified in the previous chapters, is partly about the development of a different way to think and talk about the world, ourselves and others; a mode of attention through which we increase our awareness of the spectrum of sensory experiences, and become literally more conscious of our corporeal responses to them. In terms of a sociological practice, this necessitates the education of the practitioner’s own senses. It also involves the development of recording devices, modes of transcription and representational practices, able to represent and communicate the life of the noses, bellies, fingertips and ears to wider audiences. By using such devices, sociological texts – and ethnographic description in particular – become far more able to move beyond simply stating that a situation, space or event had a ‘peculiar feel’ or ‘ambience’ to it. Rather, and critically, we will be better able to express what that particular ‘feeling’ was, and to articulate what makes ‘it’ peculiar, why we ‘felt’ it to be worth remarking upon, and what the sociological significance of that feeling was.

Of course, it need not be the case that isolated sensory experiences are always made the centre of analysis. In many instances, however, the pertinence of the data gathered through multisensory research methods demands that the sensuous be placed front and centre. My experience of the aromas circulating on the breezes of Ridley Road Market – represented in

chapter five's olfactory inventory – is exemplary in this respect. In this instance, the effort made to record and translate the olfactory experience of the market's users yielded a portrait of urban space, distinct from the ways in which multicultural space is commonly conceptualised, yet far closer to how it is often experienced. Accordingly I was compelled to bring this ambient background right to the foreground of my analysis.

So the first part of what coming to our senses, as stated previously, entails is developing the modes of attention, recording and transcription that bring the sociological text closer to the actual experience of social contexts. In some respects the application of such modes of attention and representational practices will yield accounts of experience that speak for themselves. However, 'coming our senses' is not simply about finding a mode of attention sensitive to ambient experiences, nor a language with which to translate it. As chapter five went on to demonstrate, the production of multisensory forms of recording and representation is not a sufficient end in itself. At its worst, the uncritical presentation of 'the sensuous' simply provides a validation of gut feelings for how the world really is; which leads me to the second part of what 'coming to our senses' entails. That is, 'coming to our senses' necessitates subjecting non-conscious, corporeal sensuous experiences to rigorous social scientific analysis. To return to the example of chapter five's olfactory inventory, this involved exposing the ambient experience of the market and its sensoria to the theories through which notions of identity, community and power are understood. Only then did the olfactory inventory provide a means with which to elaborate a theory of multiculturalism that operates against the ways in which 'multiculturalism' is normally thought. Through literally following both my nose, as well as those of others, and interrogating what the nose discovered, the chapter was able to argue for the impossibility of talking about urban culture in terms of fixed boundaries

or isolable essences. Rather it compelled me to foreground the cross-cultural potential realised within the everyday life of the street market.

Similarly, chapters three and four presented highly ‘sensational’ accounts of urban experience, focussing in particular on the squirm. However, while the attention given over to turning stomachs, curling lips and creeping skin provided a relatively novel way of representing urban experience, this again was not an end in itself. On the contrary, the chapter’s intention was to interrogate the veracity of the rationales ascribed to ‘gut feelings’, and to trace the social biography of these sensations. In doing so, the attention to squirms and their stimulants yielded a particular portrait of urban space, ridden with invisible, yet fiercely guarded, boundaries. These of course are not boundaries made not of tangible bricks or fences. That is not to say, however that they are not literally boundaries, simply that they are comprised of particular aromas, flavours and ambiances that certain bodies are calibrated, through hegemonic sensibilities, to experience as obstructions.

It is particularly this, the investment made by power in our bodies, through our senses, that leads me to re-emphasise the second part of what “coming to our senses” entails. Through sociologically and historically interrogating the sensuousness of everyday existence, it is possible to reveal the human potential secreted within it, and to develop ways in which that potential can be nurtured. However, critically interrogating the ambient experiences of the senses also alerts us to the inherent dangers posed to our global future by our non-conscious gut reactions to the world.

Such a dual process, of attuning thought to the sensuous life of the body, and of bringing the sensuousness of everyday experience under the remit of wider social theory, has significant

ramifications for sociological practice. For a start, a number of key sociological topics covered by this thesis, from class, gender, race and multiculturalism, through to spatial concepts such as the global and the local, appear significantly different when we actually stop merely 'looking' at them, and instead, turn all of our senses towards them.

Moreover, each of these key sociological concepts 'looks' different through each separate sense. Turning an ear towards the inner city, the evolution of language, or diversifying modes of musical expression therein also provides a different account of social formation than that provided here.²⁹ This difference is not, however, because the ear or hand offers a different angle onto the world from, for example, the nose. But rather it is because sound, like smell, vision and touch actually inscribe everyday experience with different material phenomenological qualities than the other senses. To return to the point made by Georg Simmel and quoted very early on in this thesis, "every sense delivers contributions characteristic of its individual nature to the construction of sociated existence."³⁰ Amongst the many phenomenological qualities of sounds for example, especially the sounds such as those of the football crowd or dancehall sound system whose vibrations are felt in the chest cavity, is an ability to produce collective subjective experience that can cut across social divisions.³¹ Vision and touch, on the other hand, can be credited as being the senses most likely to reify a sense of distinction between subject and object, making the lines between self and world visible and tangible. Smells and tastes, conversely, as discussed throughout this thesis, can be credited with disrupting perceived boundaries between 'inside' the body and out, as well as the

29 Roger Hewitt, *White Talk Black Talk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
Roxy Harris, *New Ethnicities and Language Use* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002).

30 Georg Simmel, *Simmel on Culture* ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: SAGE, 1997), 110.

31 Julian Henriques, "Sonic Dominance and the Reggae Sound System Session," in Michael Bull and Les Back (eds.), *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg 2003), 451–80.
Les Back "Sounds of the Stadium," in Michael Bull and Les Back, *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg 2003).

boundaries of the culture that lives through that body. This of course, is what makes them so integral to squirms and the reformation of social boundaries. It is also, however a quality that, in certain conditions, has made these senses integral to the smudging of socio-sensory cultural boundaries. To reiterate, the reason that key sociological concepts look different when we stop 'looking' at them turn all of our senses towards them is owed to the fact that each sense produces, and is reproduced by the world, differently.

Moreover, we might add to Simmel's assertion that, not only does each sense contribute characteristics of its individual nature to experience, but also that the contribution of each sense changes in accordance with the other senses it operates alongside in any given context. The experience of touch coloured by vision, for instance was, as chapter four argued, integral to the racist protocols of the twentieth century. The experience of sound, vision and touch, inflected by the experience of noses and taste-buds have, on the other hand, been central to the sustenance of a vibrant multiculturalism in contemporary London: A culture that emerges from deep within the gut; that is reflected in meals prepared everyday and the fragrances that people dress in.

Yet despite the fact that these senses have been so important to social formation within contemporary urban contexts, the relationship between noses, taste-buds, fingers, ears and social formation remains outside of the purview of sociology. As a result, those for whom life on the ground of cities is illegible, those who have simply looked at contemporary European conurbations from the on high and considered them through the amnesic and disembodied lens of theoretical abstraction, are prone to pronounce the precession of a hegemonic, homogenous form of globalisation. Moreover, they see this triumph as parallel to the retreat of local cultures into introspective life worlds.

Considering the everyday urban experiences lived through ‘the other senses’, however, we realise that despite what abstract theorisation might suggest, local forms of culture endure. Moreover what we also see when considering life on the ground of cities through the other senses is that, while local culture endures, it endures in the form of locally flavoured articulations of multiculturalism. And when we consider the history of these local forms of multiculturalism through the perspective of the other senses, we realise that they were also always transcultural, despite mobilisations of exclusive forms of sensibility. It is for such reasons, for the ability to make both the endurance of everyday multiculturalism and the threats posed to it tangible, that it is so important that sociological analysis come to its senses.

To reiterate, ‘coming to our senses’ is by no means a process peculiar to such specifically sociological concerns. Rather, it is a practice relevant to all of us, as individuals communities and institutions, reflexively engaging in the world around us. ‘Coming to our senses’ compels us to question the veracity we ascribe to our own, and others, gut feelings. It compels us to analyse the stimulus of both squirms and desires. And in doing so it compels us to recognise the machinations of power right, as it were, beneath our noses. It is for such reasons, and many more yet unknown, that we, as sociologists, but also as individuals engaged and effective in the world, need to, and hopefully are, coming to to our senses.

Methodological Afterword

While it served the purpose of outlining how I did what I did, and the coordinates within which I did it, the ‘formal statement’ on methods at the start of this thesis belies some of the issues thrown up by the multisensory aspects of this study. It also avoided a discussion of some of the considerations that lay behind my methodological decision making. Discussion of both these has been reserved for a methodological afterword.

Before going on to discuss these matters I want to tentatively offer two ‘rationales’ for having reserved them for an afterward. The first relates to the specific ‘multisensory’ form of this ethnography. Less obliquely, it relates to a desire to avoid some of the ‘methodological attention grabbing’ that waits at the sidelines of novel forms of empiricism. That is not to say that issues raised by novel methods are not important. Simply that the questions invited through the application of multisensory methods often threaten to obfuscate what such methods yield. As stated previously, ‘coming to our senses’ is not an end in itself, but a way into differently nuanced understandings of sociological concepts such as race, class, power, globalisation and multiculturalism. The methodological afterword comprises an attempt to swerve premature entanglement in methodological debates, while at the same time giving some important issues regarding methods their due attention.

The second rationale that I will offer for reserving these reflections for an afterward relates to following William Foote Whyte reflections on his own urban ethnography:

“I am convinced that the actual evolution of research ideas does not take place in accord with the formal statements we read on research methods. The ideas grow up in part out of our immersion in the data and out of the whole process of living.”¹

¹ William Foote Whyte, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Put otherwise, of all the methodological issues that were thrown up by this study, the most salient concerns were not obvious until I had finished writing. Nor, perhaps, may they have been immediately obvious to the reader. Accordingly, following both Foote Whyte, as well as a number of other ethnographers that have held to his convictions, the use of an afterword reflects an attempt to have the text mirror the chronological emergence of my own methodological concerns as the research and writing up were played out.

Accessing Ambient Experience

“What speaks to us, seemingly, is always the big event, the untoward, the extra-ordinary: the front page splash, the banner headlines. Railway trains only begin to exist when they are derailed... Aeroplanes achieve existence only when they are hijacked... What’s really going on, what we’re experiencing, the rest, all the rest, where is it? How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?”²

Perhaps the most significant practical difficulty encountered when gathering data for this thesis is created by its intention to answer the question posed above by Georges Perec. How might we access and interrogate not only the sensational foreground of people’s lives, but also the multisensory ambient buzz out of which the ‘everyday’ emerges?

As Perec seems aware, people’s experience of the sensational foreground of their lives— that which jumps out of the background — is in some respects relatively simple to access, represent and translate. The ‘sensational’ is, after all, that which we are caused to remark upon by its distinction from the banality of the background. Accordingly, we are all generally well

² Georges Perec, ‘Approaches to What?’ in Georg Perec and John Sturrock, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London: Penguin Classics, 1998), 210.

equipped to pronounce upon the sensational foreground of our lives, leaving verbal transcriptions of these experiences available for researchers and journalists.

Ambience, on the other hand, refers to the realm of experiences that are ‘felt’ by the body – which regulate its mood and activate responses – yet which never really registers at a level we would formally define as ‘discursive consciousness.’³ What this means however, is that ‘the ambient’ remains an aspect of experience that is rarely translated into verbal expression – whether that be interpersonal expression, or the silent intra-personal communication of discursive consciousness. Accordingly, standard surveys or formal interviews can be of little use to researching everyday sensory experiences, leaving the sociological valence of ambient experience particularly under-represented and under-researched.

The unsuitability of direct questions for researching the ambient sensuousness of everyday lives was made plain relatively early on in the development of this thesis. In the first few weeks of field work I developed a pilot of questions and discussion topics for people hanging around in or passing through street markets. These questions, I thought, would trigger verbal translations of their sensuous relationship with their environs. I soon discovered, however, that in nearly every instance the participant was unable to translate their experience of the immediate context. More often they looked at me with a very blank expression.

That is not to say, however, that after a couple of seconds evaluating what I had asked – and possibly my motivations for asking it – participants were unwilling to talk about their sensory experiences. On the contrary, nearly everybody I spoke to over the course of this ethnography offered ready-made narratives describing some ‘sensational’ smell or flavour that they

³ If the ‘ambience’ of a particular room or situation is ‘just right’ for instance, it will remain unremarked upon, creating no disturbance in the individual’s sense of perceptual equilibrium, lulling them into the comfort offered by familiarity.

‘personally’ found either particularly obnoxious, pleasurable or evocative. Unfortunately for me however, these narratives were invariably about elsewhere and other times than those delimited by the coordinates of this study.

It is not that that these contributions were unimportant. These personal statements – or rather the impersonal patterns within these statements – were integral to the understanding of the relationship between power, narrative, discursive consciousness, sensation and urban formations. Notably, however, these statements also brought into relief the absence of reflection on the more mundane, sensuousness of immediately lived experience.

In this respect, what was required was a set of methods that would enable the research to move beyond simply representing and interrogating the sensation that registers in people’s ‘discursive consciousness’, towards a consideration of the low-level semi-conscious experience of the body. In short the discursive inaccessibility of ‘the sensuous’ necessitated a commitment to situating my own corporeality – or as Wacquant puts it, “incarnate intelligence” – into the context of the ethnography.⁴ It was this – the multisensory immersion in the everyday life of the street markets – that alongside discussions with the market’s patrons, truly enriched my understanding of the traffic between cities, sociality and the senses. Ultimately, although not providing me with anything like the opportunity to walk in another’s shoes, the practice of being there alongside participants and reflexively experiencing the research context myself, enhanced an understanding of the relationship between the sensuousness of the everyday and the forms of identification that characterise urban contexts. Below I offer a handful of examples, hitherto undiscussed, that I think make plain what multisensory ethnographic

⁴ Loïc Wacquant, *Body & Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

immersion yields. However, there are also other examples, to which I will return, that make plain the limits of ethnographic immersion.

Acquiring Tastes

Over the three years spent conducting research Tubby Isaac's seafood stand, most of it was spent eating alongside others and sharing conversations with them. Of course, within communal dining experience, discussions, reflections and commentary about smell and taste could be initiated. However, this was far from always the case. Nor need it have been. In many respects, I was learning about many of the relationships that I wanted to dissect, first-hand. By 'first-hand', I mean to refer to experiential forms of knowledge, such as that acquired as I developed a range of new sensory fluencies and affinities. Amongst these new affinities was the unexpected development of cravings for jellied eels. While I had been a lifelong consumer of seafood, eels were something that I had previously steered well clear of. I offer the acquired taste for eels as an example, not because developing the taste is remarkable in itself. Rather I include it only because this particular example crystallises the process through which I came to understand the socio-sensory plasticity that I witnessed within the lives of many of the study's *other* participants. That is, it endowed me with the experience of a taste enmeshing a body within the social and historical context. It is primarily through the accrual of such experiences, and the cross-referencing of them with other people's gustatory praxis, that I was able to develop an understanding of the relationships that exist between everyday sensations, urban space and social formation.

Sensing Boundaries

The multisensory ethnographic immersion – through which sensory literacies and affinities were acquired – was not in any sense a straight-forward process. In many instances, the ethnographic immersion also entailed running into the socio-sensory boundaries constructed between people, things and other people. In some respects, my initial unwillingness to try jellied eels was emblematic of such a boundary. While I was initially happy to stand around the stand eating the oysters and cockles I knew from within my own culinary repertoire, this was not the same food that the majority of the stand’s patrons eat, and in some respects precluded me from an understanding of certain socio-sensory relationships, as well as marking me out as distinct in the presence of others. Remarkably this particular obstacle was surprisingly easy to overcome. However, as the following examples will demonstrate, not all of the barriers fortified by my own sensibility – nor others’ perception of me – were as easy to move beyond. In several instances, the uncompromising limits of placing my own “organism... and incarnate intelligence” at the centre of the “forces” that I aimed to dissect were made painfully plain.

One especially vivid encounter with a socio-sensory boundary occurred as I stood alongside one of the seafood stand’s patrons on a windy November evening. Having ordered the same half pint of prawns as he had I quickly discovered that he had, not simply ordered any old prawns. Whisked out of the Atlantic at particular times of year, these small pink prawns are often caught in the midst of labour. That is, they were caught, steamed and occasionally served, complete with a small clutch of spawn emerging from their abdomens. While he knew this, and had chosen these particular prawns especially, I did not discover this fact until my fingers found a cold, mushy, pink cluster of small opaque pink eggs on the underside of a

prawn. The number of my own cherished ‘classificatory’ systems that these particular crustaceans disturbed, and ultimately shored up, not only gave me first-hand experience of an incredibly intense squirm. In this instance, the offense that my offense caused provided a visceral illustration of the distance that bodies, and their peculiar sensibilities, can produce between one another.

A similar example, and perhaps more sociologically salient, emerges amidst my initial forays into the lock up units behind the main strip of Ridley Road Market. Having heard many stories about the market previously, I was pretty certain that if any of the sensational details featured in those narratives were in fact true, my own sensibility would inhibit me from situating my own “incarnate intelligence” in the line of that particular fire.⁵ Yet, as I would also discover elsewhere, it was not merely my own sensibility that would obstruct me from practically experiencing this particular arena. Rather it was also other peoples’: While I found nothing of any real ‘sensational’ significance in the market’s recesses, a number of informants were adamant about the endurance of a trade in monkey meat at the market, and suggested that such things were probably being made invisible to me. Even if I had the personal capacity to acquire this particular sensory literacy or ‘taste’, informants insisted that others’ perception of me would still prohibit access to it.

The fact of something being hidden from you is, of course, impossible to either prove nor disprove. There is little denying, however, that being of a minority age, gender and skin tone amongst middle-aged Caribbean, South Asian, Turkish and West African female shoppers – let alone clutching a notepad, pen, sound recorder and camera – there were in fact numerous elements of the “action” in the market that it remained very difficult for me to submit my

⁵ Loïc Wacquant, *Body & Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

body “to the fire” of. The heat, it seemed would always dissipate as I approached it. While I cannot illustrate this with a bush meat example, the inaccessibility of certain areas of the market produced through both my own perception of others, and others’ perception of me, can be illustrated through another example – less sensational than a trade in primate meat although equally pertinent. The following detour is an excerpt taken from the earliest of field notes kept throughout the research. On one of my first days’ ethnographic incursions to the market, I was:

“Drawn into a particular stall off to the side of the main strip of the market by a display of pea aubergines – a foodstuff I was familiar with from my paternal domestic environment, but had not seen in this country for years, let alone braided and bunched up like beige grapes. Yet what seized my attention was the box I noticed at my feet; a brown cardboard container of glossy, light-brown, calcite and conical mollusc shells. At the first glance I identified these as conches – a shell shape I vaguely remembered from my childhood, perhaps a shell from my grandmother’s collection of ornamental sea-shells. It certainly seemed plausible: Conch shells, I knew, contained a muscular, tasty foot that was relatively common on menus in the Caribbean. Surprised to see these stashed in a corner of a vegetable grocer I childishly wanted to see these uncanny artefacts with my hands. I picked one up. The shell was cold, larger than the palm of my hand and smooth, but not as smooth as I had expected. As I turned it around in my hand two antennae slowly unfurled from the hard spiralled shell, and a firm fleshy body started to uncurl and splay over my fingers. It was not, as I was starting to realise, what I understood a conch to be. I glanced back down at the box to see a small degree of movement in a number of the other molluscs. Not the shell on my grandmother’s shelf, but rather the one from my cousin’s glass tank – his childhood pet. A Giant African snail. And they did not look as though they were for keeping as pets. I turned towards the stall holder, who had previously been busy stacking bottles:

“How do you cook these?” I asked nonchalantly.

This was a typical opener that I was using to start a rapport with traders. While on many occasions I was at feigning a partial degree of ignorance, on this occasion I was not.

Looking me up and down he paused for a second before stating abruptly, “You don’t even know if I eat them.”

This was followed by an excruciatingly long silence during which my heart sped up as my mouth dried out. My initial strategy seemed to be to assume that the stall holder was joking. I laughed, then turned to his friend, with whom he'd been conversing.

"Do you eat them?"

More silence. Then, "Get out!" I'm not sure which of the two said this.

I moved to put the shell back down in its box on the floor and simultaneously pivoted to turn out of the stall. Another man, a trader from a neighbouring stall stepped in having heard the exchange.

Before I could return the snail to its box the shell was taken out of my hands. "You crack the shell and scoop up like this, then chop," he said as he made a chopping motion with one hand perpendicular to the other, glancing at the the stall holder. "Then you fry em up. Soups as well."

"Oh thanks. Thanks. Ok." I said, keen to leave as quickly as possible.

Over the next five minutes my heart rate returned to near normal rate.

While I was eventually offered a recipe for these particular molluscs, what I initially experienced here were some of the visceral limits of trying to know all aspects of life in the street market through my own corporeal experience. Doubtlessly some aspects of my own sensibility had opened windows between my experience and those that of my study participants, and provided numerous opportunities for discussion. Elsewhere however, there were evidently chasms that could not be crossed through experiential knowledge alone, chasms created both by the forms of power invested in my own sensibility, but also, importantly, through others correlated perceptions of me.

It was not only, it must be noted here, while wandering around Ridley Road that my own body – and people's perceptions of it – precluded access to specific areas. An analogous inhospitality was initially experienced within Petticoat Lane. Therein I first started the ethnography dressed in a thick sweater, denim jacket, cargo pants, woolly hat and fingerless gloves, armed with the latest trivia on West Ham United – an ensemble I embarrassingly believed to be the signature of the market users and traders. As I have since realised through

time spent at the market, the result of this ill-fitting costume was that I was initially perceived to be an undercover policeman, a devious undercover journalist, or perhaps even more regrettably, a naive, slightly insensitive ethnographer. In this instance however, as well as within most areas of Ridley Road, the social distance created through others perceptions of me, as well as mine of them, was steadily overcome as we integrated each other into our daily lives over the course of three years.

Yet despite the eventual access to the market's everyday life that I achieved, the exclusion enacted through both my perception of the world and the world's perception of me, is a powerful testament to the possible limits of placing the ethnographer's own "organism... and incarnate intelligence" at the centre of the "forces" he intended to dissect. It is also suggestive of the potential damage done to others through careless attempts at 'heroic immersion' within a specific field. Such experiences were not, however, entirely devoid of sociological value. On the contrary, the experience of my own multisensory squeamishness, combined with others perceptions of me, is also exemplary of the social barriers constructed, and social strata reproduced, through the embodiment of particular ways of sensing the world.

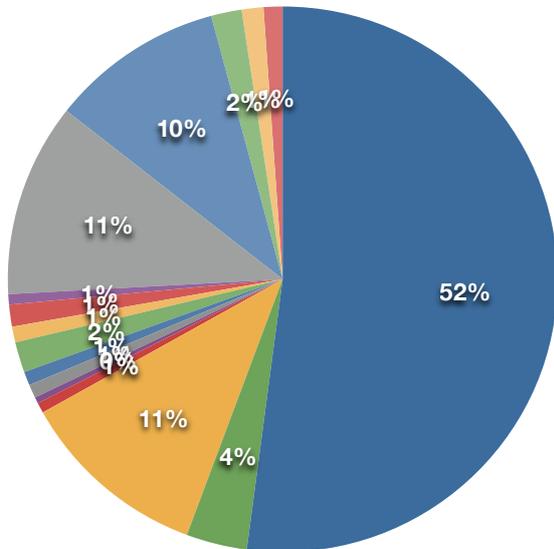
The Value of Experiential Knowledge

It must be noted that while many areas of the market's everyday life were either initially insensible to, or sequestered from me, many more soon became sensible to me. This shift is largely attributable to the development of a multisensory literacy of the market space and its daily activity which was achieved by integrating my presence there into my own life, and by those at the market becoming familiar with me. Such was the extent of the mutual integration of these spaces that on one bleak January morning, after about eighteen months of regular

visits to Petticoat Lane, the owner of the seafood stand commented, as he handed me my morning eels, “You’re like a bit of an old timer down here now aren’t you?” Indeed, through changes that I underwent in my own body, I had adopted the habituated gustatory praxis and culinary rhythms analogous to those of an erstwhile generation of the stand’s visitors. Yet I remain conscious of the fact that such experiences do not in any way provide objective access to the lived experience of an ‘old timer’s’ life, nor that of anybody else’s. What multisensory ethnographic methods provide above all else – and this is not of any less social scientific value – is an embodied understanding of the traffic between the researcher’s own body, and the sensoria and social forms constituting the field. An increased sensory attention within ethnographic practice enables the researcher to map the development of sensibilities, to record the complex sensory landscape of the research field, and to map corporeal responses to it. It is above all the increased definition with which the social world appears through such practices that provide the strongest case for ‘coming to our senses’. Through such methods and their correlated representational practices, it is possible to start answering Georges Perec’s questions about the significance of the everyday, to reveal the struggles inherent in the banal everyday experience, as well as the human potential that is secreted within it.

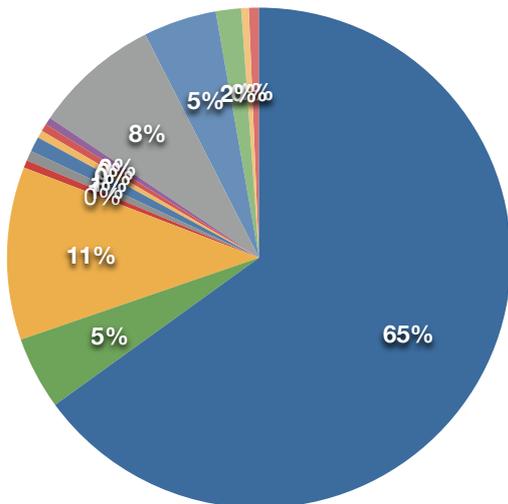
Appendix A: Dalston, Employment and Ethnicity¹

Dalston, Demography by Ethnicity

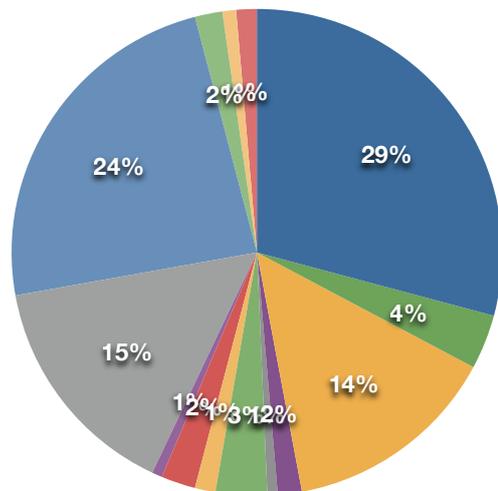


- (White - British)
- (White - Irish)
- (White - Other)
- (Mixed - White and Black Caribbean)
- (Mixed - White and Black African)
- (Mixed - White and Asian)
- (Mixed - Other)
- (Asian - Indian)
- (Asian - Pakistani)
- (Asian - Bangladeshi)
- (Asian - Other)
- (Black or Black British - Black Caribbean)
- (Black or Black British - Black African)
- (Black or Black British - Other)
- (Chinese or Other Ethnic Group - Chinese)
- (Chinese or Other Ethnic Group - Other)

Dalston, Managers and Senior Officials by Ethnicity



Dalston Elementary Services by Ethnicity



¹ Charts and data compiled by author from data sets held by Nomis Web, The Office of National Statistics

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