EDGE SYNTAX

Vocabularies for Violent Times

> A vocabulary is a specific kind of knowledge assemblage and interven-
> tion. Its etymological roots lie in the act of giving a name to things, just
> as its contemporary meaning underscores the need to expand the "range
> of words" available to us. Both are means to make a range of realities
> intelligible, visible and relevant. Vocabularies, in one sense, are maps of
> different life-worlds of knowledge, including their hierarchies.
> **GAUTAM BHAN, "NOTES ON A SOUTHERN URBAN PRACTICE," 2019**

Over the past ten years I've been part of research collaborations exploring
micro-economies on streets in urban peripheries across the United King-
dom, in places where jobs are hard to come by and the impacts of auster-
ity governance are sorely felt. We've been compelled by questions of how
the asymmetries of global migration overlap with the ongoing ferocities of
urban marginalization, and which types of diverse economies emerge in
this multi-scalar constellation. It has been a tumultuous decade, marked
by the brutal intersection of human residualization and racialization that
has played out in the everyday life of urban peripheries with devastating
consequences. Streets in the "edge territories" (Hall 2021, 59) of U.K. cit-
ies make visible the compounded impacts of the state and market shatter-
ing of infrastructures of affordability, support, and dignity. The systemic
undermining of infrastructures that sustain meaningful and reasonably
secure prospects to make life and livelihoods has been propelled through
combined forces of residualization.

Profound urban inequalities across the U.K. have been heightened by dramatic reductions of public care forged through austerity governance, where the burden of state deficit following the 2008 financial crisis was disproportionately borne by the most deprived sectors of society. The exacerbation of inequality has been further advanced by the global financialization of urban property markets that capitalizes on the speculative potential of urban margins, evidenced in the sale of affordable public housing and assets by local authorities in an attempt to shore up their reduced budgets. Over the same period, we've witnessed the hurtling of the labor market toward casualization and self-employment, with impacts especially pronounced in racialized and minoritized groups. Such overlapping processes of diminution compel us to think about a lifeworld of work in the urban peripheries in which enduring borders, long working hours, and escalating rentals prevail (Hall 2021). The edge, therefore, regarded as an acutely precarious and lively assemblage, is not simply a physical location but also a structural, material, and psychological relation to power. We've explored the commonplace banality of the street in relation to what Stuart Hall encapsulates as its "improvised gestures" (Hall and Schwarz 2018, 7). This requires an engagement with the edge as neither a peripheral nor a minority condition, but instead as a space through which the violent syntax of multiple dispossessions occurs alongside lively acts of refusal.

From the street we learn of a variety of vocabularies of making work and repurposing space. In this chapter I pull to the foreground different ways of communicating or "giving a name" to the edge in order to contest processes of displacement and to "expand the range of words" (Bhan 2019, 640) available to us to think about work and the kinds of attainable space required to make a living. The research collaborations I've been a part of have been shaped by an ethnographic commitment to the life of street transactions. They have also been compelled by the possibilities of capturing and translating these diverse forms of exchange for an array of public audiences as a practice of rendering "a range of realities intelligible, visible, and relevant" (Bhan 2019, 640). Working within interdisciplinary research teams on a number of research projects focused on street livelihoods in urban peripheries between 2012 and 2018, we were to learn that the matter of gathering a syntax of edge economies and then transmuting vocabularies that might speak to traders, planners, politicians, and activists is an unstable process. In addition, edge territories are saturated with deep structural violence, and such vocabularies need to articulate not only *where* the effects of dispossession are most likely to be located, but also *who* is most likely to be affected (Gilmore 2002).

A violent milieu demands commensurate practices and strategies, in trying to keep open to effective ways of listening, in forging tactics of how to speak to various audiences, and in organizing the activation of language so that it might be heard. We were to learn that because dialogue is a process of assemblage, it too is unpredictable, and we often were caught between "that ambiguous space in which differences are permitted a hearing" and more-restricted idioms in which values are already presupposed (Chambers 1994, 31). In this chapter I briefly reflect on three different but related modes of syntax we evolved, each time learning about the limitations and occasional possibilities of composing vocabularies of "evidence" to intervene in processes of dispossession. I unpack how we engaged with the syntax of *counting*, of *detailing*, and of *activating*, as modes of speaking to established presumptions of what counts and, by implication, who matters. The elevation or relegation of what and who matters further brings into play "the wider environment of 'whiteness' in the dominant values and practices in planning processes," and raises questions about what forms we speak through and what is recognized or suppressed in the conventions or disruptions of vocabulary (Kobayashi and Peake 2000, 393).

I begin with a focus on Rye Lane in Peckham, south London, at the time of an intensive regeneration agenda encapsulated in the local borough council's redevelopment plan for the Peckham Town Centre. On the street, transactions emerge from crossovers of proprietors, hustlers, shops, internet cafés, beauty salons, money remittance services, butcheries, and markets. A number of evangelical churches, yoga groups, and performance scenes rent out the large spaces to the rear of the street, while religious and spiritual spaces, art venues, and food bars of varying types find a place above, below, and behind the street. The varied modes of exchange that compose the street include forms of self-interest and cooperation along with practices of profit-making, profiteering, subsisting, care, and counsel (Hall et al. 2017). Southwark Council's "Revitalise: Peckham and Nunhead Area Action Plan" of 2014 proclaims the prospects for a "Fairer future" and, like many area action plans across London, the document highlights "concentrations of large development opportunities" (Southwark Council 2014, 18). Since 2010, the Council has had its budget nearly halved (Southwark Council 2018, 6), and the impacts of austerity governance in this borough and across London have further propelled the sell-off of public assets, including council housing. This has further stimulated state-led forms of "regeneration" and, with it, the pronounced loss of affordable space for both housing and livelihoods. Over the past decade, Land Registry data and estate agent

sites reveal a significant increase in property prices in Southwark, while between 2001 and 2011 there had been an overall decline in the proportion of households renting from the local authority, alongside an increase in private rental tenure (Southwark Council 2015, 13).

The combined processes of regeneration and dispossession continue to unfold across London, where racialized and minoritized groups are frequently disproportionately affected. This may occur through how the financialization of housing estates might be accompanied by policing (Perera 2019) as well as how affordable work space is eroded (King et al. 2018). Edge territories are therefore spaces where the conjoined violations of state and market have differential and differentiating impacts, surfacing the reach of dispossession in the intersections of "race," class, and locality. In order to claim space, citizens of the edge acquire improvisational repertoires to contend with prevailing precarity and discrimination. In the lively struggles to hold onto space, they draw on material and associational resources to challenge the vocabularies of redevelopment. On the street, an everyday politics of the edge is established through a "spatial dissensus" where self-organization is deployed to combat specific acts of regeneration, and where subjectivities declare their presence through practices of meaning-making sustained in the arrangement of objects, surfaces, and contact (Vardy 2019). As researchers we are therefore engaged in multidirectional and at times disorienting processes of hearing multiple registers, and of communicating among and across multiple audiences. Doing this research can at times feel like an involvement in a dissonant process, trying to stay close to the dynamic expressions of the street, while at the same time attempting to infuse the procedures of planning with an edge syntax.

Counting: Do Numbers Matter?

Starting from the margins of Rye Lane in Peckham, south London, I explore how proprietors on the street form a "range of words" to circumvent a consortium of redevelopment initiatives to turn their margin into a center. In Southwark Council's regeneration plan for the Peckham Town Centre, detailed in its "Revitalise: Peckham and Nunhead Area Action Plan" of 2014, Peckham is identified as historically having a "negative reputation" arising from "high crime levels and feelings of the area not being safe." In contrast, the town center is identified as "a creative and cultural hub" well disposed for redevelopment, where the mechanism of the Area Action Plan is envis-

aged as having the directive capacity to alter the image of Peckham itself by enrolling developers, land owners, and the local authority in developing their respective sites (Southwark Council 2014, 28). The positioning of Peckham as a historically problematic area fits within the edict of "spatial liberalism," in which the instrumental nature of the market-state compact has placed a different kind of pressure on the margins, often relegating it in order to reconstitute it (Clarke and Cochrane 2013).

The format of state-led regeneration requires using the comprehensive vocabulary of master plans to assert the legitimacy of wide sweeping change, with a concomitant commitment to something being broken and requiring fixing. The regeneration rhetoric imbued in vocabularies of revitalization, job provision, and the creation of mixed communities needs to be placed adjacent to the crucial question of who is being valued or devalued. By thinking about how stigmatization occurs in relation to planning "as a cultural and political economy," Imogen Tyler and Tom Slater advance our understanding of the production of abjection in the coordinated reordering of urban space (2018, 721). Relegation is produced in structural and atmospheric entanglements, where surfaces, statistics, and vocabularies are invoked, thus overlooking grounded practices of city-making. When our research team started our fieldwork on Rye Lane in 2012, we were interested in its everyday formations of social and economic life forged within a context of durable marginality and unfolding multiculture. Over our three-year research period, we became aware of the differing ways in which a planned revitalization process for the Peckham Town Centre was being advanced. We were unaware of any detailed analysis of the street's economies that had been undertaken from the perspective of the shops, market stalls, and street vendors. Rather, user needs and consumer preferences had been engaged, leading to the identification of aspirations for a wider retail offer as core to the remaking of the center.

The risk in such processes of consultation is that the parlance of a familiar entertainment and retail cache of multinational chains is foregrounded within design and planning processes. "Clone Town Britain" speaks to the ubiquitous reliance on the formats of apparently predictable retail chains and franchises across streets and in town centers, one that has been revealed as a brittle corporatized model that is highly susceptible to economic and social crises (Cox et al. 2010). In contrast, the loose cohesion of independent shop proprietors and street vendors that comprise the street remains less legible to the highly formalized and professionalized circuits of regeneration expertise. When we spoke with Abdul, an independent

street proprietor who has had a shop on Rye Lane for many years, he reflected on how he perceived the traders' lack of recognition in the planning process by stating, "The problem is, they don't see us." When I interviewed a planner involved with the redevelopment plans for the Peckham Town Centre, I asked him to comment on how he understood how Rye Lane fits within the Council's broader notion of economic value. Tim clarified, "The Council has an economic development strategy: to articulate a strong and inclusive economy. There are tensions between large-scale developments versus supporting existing economies to grow. These two things don't always meet well."

Questions of vocabulary are also questions of voice, and processes of planned regeneration can be underscored by the conformity of professionalized expertise. Streets like Rye Lane reveal a city-making that emerges through a choreography of sidesteps and subversions, a consortium of improvisational imperatives tuned by residents and small-scale operators. Throughout the street various proprietors rewire existing business and social circuits to divert and reconfigure otherwise unavailable infrastructures. Part of the work of this chapter is to engage with the contradictions we juggled, of how we could explore a respective makeshift epistemology, while still wanting to speak to those in the local authority. On Rye Lane we began our research process in what felt like a straightforward way, starting by walking the ground floor stretch of two-hundred-odd tightly packed retail units, engaging with respective shop proprietors. We designed a basic one-page survey, which was brief enough so as not to disrupt their entrepreneurial rhythm, but which allowed us a face-to-face entree into each shop and the start of a conversation.
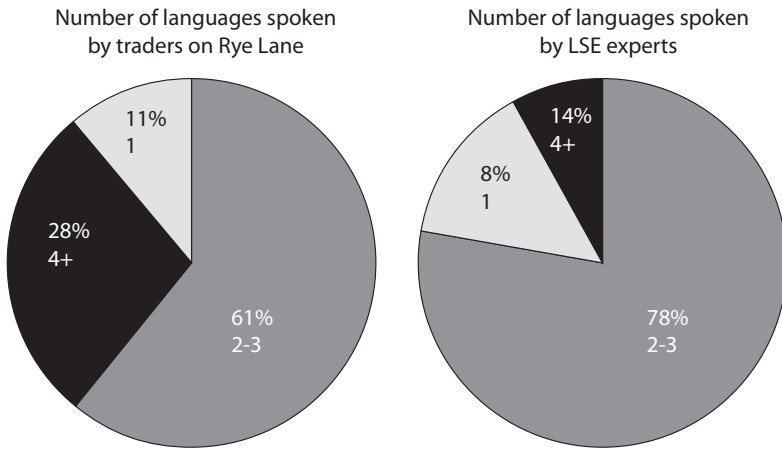
After a couple of weeks of walking and talking, we had spoken to the majority of proprietors and had a sense of whom we could go back to for more-extended conversations, observations, and spatial mappings. Out of this fairly loose, tangible process, we formatted a stiffer set of survey results. A numeric dataset allowed us to incorporate the rudimentary details of 199 units of retail, with close to two-thirds of these retailers operating in independent, nonaffiliated retail. The spectrum of retail trade primarily included clothing, food with specialties in fish and Halal meat, beauty products largely comprising hair and nail bars, money remittances, and mobile phone products and services. Ground floor space was at a premium, testified to by the limited number of vacancies and charity shops. Just under half the proprietors had occupied their shops on the street for five years or fewer. For the most part, we used these numbers to raise a set

of questions for ourselves, as well as to deploy a manner of speaking to engage with planners and local officials that we presumed might fit with the bureaucratic procedures of planning.

The street survey allowed us to locate global displacements in relation to urban emplacements, tracing the histories and geographies of proprietors from a wide array of countries: Afghanistan, England, Eritrea, Ghana, India, Iran, Ireland, Jamaica, Kashmir, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, and Yemen. Their co-presence points to urban multicultures forged through the "postcolonial continuum" of Britain's imperial history and its continued practices of political interventionism, which makes its way to the everyday life of cities across the U.K. (Jazeel 2019, 65). As part of our survey, we asked proprietors how many languages they spoke, and while almost two-thirds of proprietors told us they spoke two or three languages, close to a third said they spoke four languages or more. We were intrigued by how street proprietors used language, as well as by the ways in which multilingual proficiency is nurtured as strategic, cultural, and sociable, shaping varied forms of communication but also suggesting repertoires acquired in navigating multiple borders.

During our street research, a key challenge was to find ways of communicating the street's values to local authorities within the Council in the hope that this might influence planning considerations. One of our first tactics was to develop a form of montage: to take the practices of the street and in effect to translate them, using established languages of cultural and planning value in the hope that this would render the street legible to this authority. We took a printed plan of Peckham Town Centre in south London and placed it side by side with a plan of the acclaimed Westfield Stratford City shopping center in east London, highlighting how the granular infrastructure of the town center delivers more jobs. We then juxtaposed the multilingualism of the street with the multilingualism of "experts" at the London School of Economics and Political Science (figure 11.1) to suggest how language proficiency might be understood as a twenty-first-century-citizenship capacity, constituting a diverse social capital to interpret, to learn, to transfer, and finally to involve wider forms of communication (Hall 2013).

These visualizations always got a few nods and laughs in the meeting rooms with Council officials and planning professionals alike, but it also seemed that this kind of counting and translating could only take us so far and no further. It may be that the juxtapositions were indeed too close a fit with the master's tools, or perhaps even were a cultural conceit or amus-

Number of languages spoken by traders on Rye Lane

- 11% 1
- 28% 4+
- 61% 2-3

Number of languages spoken by LSE experts

- 14% 4+
- 8% 1
- 78% 2-3

11.1 Multilingual citizenship: Number of languages spoken by shop proprietors on Rye Lane (left) and by LSE experts (right). Drawn by Adriana Valdez-Young

ing comparison, where the numbers themselves were interesting but not crucial. A regeneration process was already in motion, one reliant on large-scale investors who possibly had a more convincing or translatable set of numbers and narratives to portray. But our numbers did not fall completely by the wayside; they began to be picked up and used by various activist groups, contesting the specificities of the Peckham Plan either through locally organized action, or through collectives challenging the narrow articulations of the economy in the mayor's London Plan. Our numbers and drawings were put together with perspectives from other research on streets, markets, and industrial hives, where a combined narrative began to emerge not only about quantities of jobs but also about diverse econo-mies as being extended networks of livelihoods, transactions, and forms of exchange and care. The account put forward by crucial alliances in London like the informal alliance, Just Space, argues for a variety of modes of mak-ing economies, and pointedly recognizes the everyday socio-spatial infra-structures required to sustain them.

Detailing: Capturing Spatial Practice

Teresa Caldeira refers to peripheries as "spaces that frequently unsettle official logics," and places that offer the possibilities of transformation without "erasing the gaps" forged by durable inequalities (Caldeira 2017, 3).

In this part of the chapter, I'd like to expand on the unheroic struggles of the edge shaped in the unspectacular forms of interior subdivisions and multiple occupations of space on Rye Lane. The suggestive possibilities of the directive of infrastructure put forward by AbdouMaliq Simone (2017) and James Holston (2009) foreground the tangible stakes of place and the convening powers of territory in procuring everyday politics. Affordable homes and affordable workplaces are elemental to life in the margins and are therefore the means of agency as well as the instruments of insurgency. This requires a regard for how a cultural street politics is shaped from the interior, apart from the historic possibilities of working-class districts collectively politicized and culturalized by wage labor and union representation. The self-employed and part-time workers and proprietors on a street such as Rye Lane have no singular affiliation. Moreover, their economic and cultural presence is increasingly questioned by the burgeoning border politics that perpetuates societal bordering in the U.K. and racialized comprehensions of value. Their unity is falling incomes and rising rents, as much as the bricks-and-mortar format of shop interiors that provide possibilities for experimentation and expression.

When we conducted our street walks, we noticed that as many as one in four of the ground floor shops practiced what we called "urban mutualism," an intense subdivision of shop space in which multiple activities are colocated and in which varied forms of tenure arise (Hall 2015). In mapping the minutiae of multiple subdivisions of shops along Rye Lane, we were able to explore the recalibrating of space that establishes a spatial realignment and repurposes more-brittle tenure arrangements. The reconfiguration of interiors is partly lodged within the logic of the market and dramatic increases in property values in Peckham, where the affordability of street space has to be secured through other means. Spatial subdivisions and sublettings have become a dynamic practice of contending with the urban premium of escalating markets across cities, and these emergent circuits are highlighted not without concern for what these densely orchestrated divisions and inhabitations mean for privacy, ritual, exploitation, and stress. Careful, grounded research has revealed these reappropriations of city space as being more than perfunctory or extractive responses to the ever-increasing weight of market impositions. In a stunning comparative collection, Margot Rubin et al. (2020) reveal this auto-densification as being a rewording of intimacy in the intensification of precarity and proximity, where new spatial practices forge the everyday struggles for alternatives.

Taking a closer look at the interiors of these reconfigured spaces on Rye Lane reveals a dense overlap of activities, aesthetics, and tenures, and over a period of three years we mapped several of these spaces by recording and visualizing their composition. In our mapping of a large double-story unit on the street, we marked the outer boundary of the shop with a dark outline that signifies the shop unit as a whole (figure 11.2). Within this unit are several visible internal subdivisions, resulting in a carving up and parceling out of space according to cultural and economic practices. Much of the designation of divisions in this large shop area was driven by a mixture of pragmatics and sociability. The shop's proprietor, Adofo, had arrived in the U.K. from Ghana some twenty-five years ago and had started out by selling products from a table in the Brixton market. We spoke with Kofi, Adofo's son-in-law, who explained how the shop space is apportioned:

> You see, if you enter here, everything can be got from here. If you come to buy a body cream you can also get a haircut, or have your clothing made or repaired, or book a flight to Ghana or send your cash back home. You kill five birds with one stone. There is no point of going elsewhere. The things we have here is just like being back home and it really reminds you of being in Ghana. We also make it feel like this in the way we've set up and arranged the shop.

Barbara, Adofo's daughter, oversees the ground floor area, largely committed to fresh produce and including a Western Union remittance store at the rear. The ground floor is arranged to "greet the street," pulling customers in through the arrangement of fresh food, jars of spices and herbs, and dried fish. These arrangements of crates, boxes, and trays of food gradually begin to narrow down, forming a single aisle leading to the remittance desk.

Winding up the staircase toward the rear of the shop, one enters a loosely subdivided space where a hairdresser, three tailors, a travel agent, and a cash exchange colocate. At one end the tailors each have their own cutting desk and sewing machine, and are reportedly "busy, busy, busy." A large sofa marks out their end of the upper room, making a delineation between the stacked piles of patterned cottons and silks that are arranged in the center of the room, not reaching more than seat height so that customers can stroll around the piles, perusing the variety of cloths. Cynthia's hair salon at the other end is a few meters squared, and she pays a low-risk, small rental of £80 for her chair per week. This chair rental arrangement, which spans across the city, is central to the viability of the expanding hair
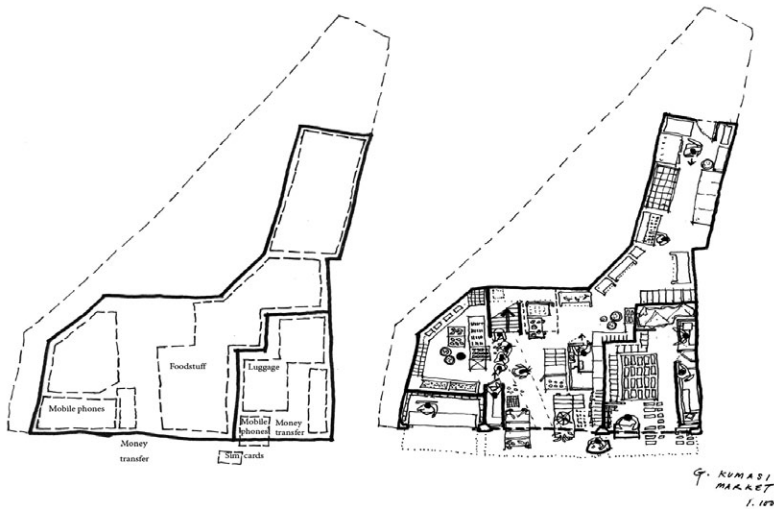
11.2 A subdivided interior on Rye Lane. Drawn by Thomas Aquilina
Legend: 1 Mobile phone, 2 Money transfer, 3 Foodstuff, 4 Luggage, 5 Money transfer,
6 Mobile phone, 7 SIM card

and nail sector, and is occupied largely by female stylists. These stylists work without job security, and flexibility is core to their precarious balance of variable working hours that can only be sustained though low-risk tenure arrangements. Balancing family commitments is a further consideration, and Kofi, who generally works upstairs, comments that, "After school I don't have to rush and can bring my kids here before we all head home."

Nonetheless, times are hard on the street, and Francesca, who has traded on Rye Lane for many years, talks about the constant struggle against difficult times, saying: "These days it's getting tough with us. Customers are bagging [buying] a little. The shops are divided by little, little, little. It's hard to make even £100 in a day." This stringent reality, produced by durable inequality and exacerbated by heightened periodic stress such as the financial crisis or the COVID pandemic, takes its toll on the residents and proprietors of the "edge." In the absence of meaningful structural distribution, affordable space remains a recourse to claiming life and livelihood, and the interior subdivisions of shops on Rye Lane are maintained through everyday practices that elude professionalized accounts of value (Tayob 2018). Detailing rental agreements and shared leases matters, because doing so captures the intricacies of practice that are impossible to comprehend through research encounters that privilege surveys and quantified representations. On Rye Lane, detailing reveals the rescaling

of the edge—a carving up of space and time into ever-smaller increments to contend with external pressures and to incorporate internal meanings. This vocabulary of the edge is inherently about adaptation and assertion, accommodating forms of expression that entail survival and personhood, only just ahead of the relentless reach of the market and state.

Activating: Why Coalition Is Key

In the period following our research on Rye Lane, our project expanded to explore edge economies on streets in deindustrialized peripheries across several U.K. cities, where the impacts of punitive immigration acts were unfolding with brutal effect. Engaging in this larger comparative project had the effect of making us acutely aware of the pervasive nature of social injustice unfolding across urban peripheries. We continued to seek out vocabularies and strategies to engage in listening and mapping, but it was only in working more closely with an activist group that we saw other possibilities for grounded research practice. One example arose in 2018 when we were approached by Latin Elephant, an activist group that had evolved to "promote alternative and innovative ways of engaging and incorporating migrant and ethnic groups in processes of urban change in London" (https://latinelephant.org). The activists had been committed to working with traders within and around the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre over many years, getting to know their needs, fears, and aspirations, coordinating support around legal rights and responsibilities, and linking together with campaigns against the unfolding displacement in the area. They were in the process of preparing evidence to object to a planning application for the redevelopment of the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre, a strategic site in south London long occupied by traders alongside a steady stream of commuters who congregate to catch one of numerous buses or trains that converge in this busy hub. Nicolas, a shopkeeper, expands on the role of such a hub, remarking: "We are quite well-known for helping people. We have people coming from the airport with their luggage! Once the shopping center is gone, the commercial hub will be scattered."

The shopping center lies some three kilometers to the north of Rye Lane, and adjacent to another large-scale regeneration scheme incorporating the demolition of a total of 1,214 housing units on the former Heygate Estate. The newly developed Elephant Park introduces 2,704 housing units to the area, but with its minimal provision for affordable and socially

rented housing, the regeneration translates into the significant displacement of affordability. A committed collective of advocacy and campaign groups in the area has actively supported a call for considered political engagement to determine, when affordable space is so vital to the lives and livelihoods of urban citizens, why it is being so substantially eroded. The particular purpose of Latin Elephant's evidence base was to challenge Southwark Council's approval of the developer Delancey's plan to demolish the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre to develop a new town center and college campus. The existing advocacy by Latin Elephant called for the protection of the 130 independent and largely "Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic" traders (a term established by the state), who were currently within the red line designation for development. Our collaboration with Latin Elephant was meant to generate additional evidence to supplement their work in supporting their objection, which was to be lodged in the formal terms and formats determined by the due-planning process. The varied objections to the application were to be scrutinized by the Southwark Council and by the mayor of London and the Greater London Authority (GLA). Our project team, led by Julia King, developed a report on the "Socio-economic Value at the Elephant and Castle" (King et al. 2018) underscoring the need to protect affordable workspace in the context of current area regeneration and businesses' displacement. At stake were the livelihoods of the 130 traders who occupied the space inside and around the shopping center, and who were being offered substantially less space for immediate relocation, with additional affordable floor space promised by 2019. However, the affordable retail space would still leave a significant shortfall from the traders' original shop occupations.

The central narrative of our report was to push at what constitutes affordability in the redevelopment of the center, bringing issues of class and cultural diversity into the understanding of both the impacts of social change and the possibilities of diverse economies. We argued that "The systematic demise of affordability across London is a form of discrimination. Planning should actively regulate against the loss of genuinely affordable spaces to live and work, with regulation to protect affordable housing provision" (King et al. 2018, 11). Planning-based struggles over residents' right to the city accommodations are constituted by the concern for retaining space that is not only affordable in a pragmatic sense but also adaptable in a cultural sense. Class-based struggles are, as well, cultural struggles that incorporate lived experiences of gender and "race," in which affordable space is an essential infrastructure for these multifarious expressions
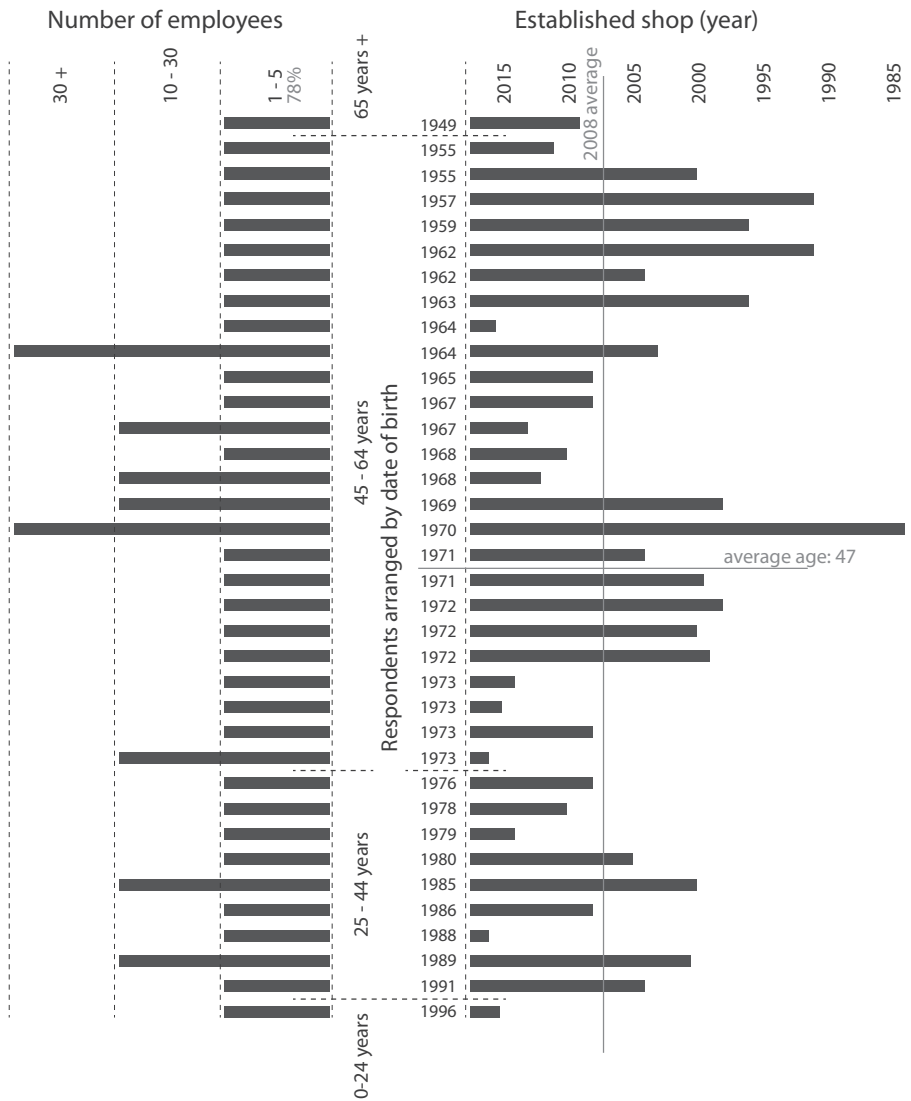
and networks of support to be sustained. Indira, a long-standing tenant, qualified it this way:

> We are not just a food place. We are an information point. People come here and ask for a doctor or a bank. Some people even ask about other restaurants! It is kind of sad because if we moved to other places people may see it more difficult to come in.

In building on the original Latin Elephant survey of shop proprietors, we learned that many of the traders and shopkeepers were women, some of whom were holding down more than one form of work to make ends meet. Based on data available from thirty-six respondents, close to half of our respondents were in the age category of fifty-plus, and half the tenants had held their leases for ten years or more (figure 11.3). This speaks to the high levels of investment that proprietors had made over time, building their small businesses and actively contributing to the social life of the shopping center. In regeneration processes, tenants are often left in the invidious position of not being able to claim back this sweat equity or to formally capture the meaning of their contributions.

Final approval for the Delancey redevelopment plan was granted by the Greater London Authority on December 10, 2018. A coalition of research and activist organizations, including Latin Elephant and local grassroots groups working together with the area's traders and residents, had argued hard for a reconsideration of affordable space and the attendant dignity of secure tenure. In terms of an extension of affordable work and trading spaces in the new development, the initial proposal was expanded from a five-year to a fifteen-year commitment. The research had also presented dispossession as an ongoing process of wearing the infrastructure of the center down over a sustained period, including the gradual closure of retail units and the decline of maintenance. This was important in gaining reassurances about the continued maintenance and upkeep of trading activities during the transition period before the shopping center would be demolished.

This, however, is a story of small gains, and about the diminutive but important role of short and sharp action research, both of which tack onto much-longer and substantial processes of lively resistance. The battle for the Elephant and Castle has been sustained by a broad solidarity of multiple activist groups, legal challenges, marches and sit-ins, and even a host of exhibitions, films, and texts. Those multiple modalities that are committed, agile, and assertive might yield comparatively small concessions from

Number of employees

Established shop (year)

30 + 10 – 30 1 – 5 78% 65 years + 2015 2010 2008 average 2005 2000 1995 1990 1985

Respondents arranged by date of birth

1949
1955
1955
1957
1959
1962
1962
1963
1964
1964
45 – 64 years
1965
1967
1967
1968
1968
1969
1970
1971
average age: 47
1971
1972
1972
1972
1973
1973
1973
1973
1976
25 – 44 years
1978
1979
1980
1985
1986
1988
1989
1991
1996
0-24 years

11.3 Graph showing relationships between proprietors, age, an approximate number of employees, and shop longevity. Drawn by Julia King

the virulent force of regeneration, but they do not fade and their strategies of intervention are continually sharpened. Our research, together with the report format of evidence that we sought to develop over the summer of 2018, in many ways signals the limited capacities of academic research. We have the privilege of sustained employment and funding that affords us the time to invest in the long trajectory of a research interest or passion, which then allows us to build up repertoires of listening, speaking, and writing. But most often, our available syntax is relatively staid and our communication remains constrained within predefined formats. An "edge syntax," by contrast, is sustained in other activations—in ways of speaking that encompass the violence of our time and place, the urgencies of intervention, and the recognition of *who* is at stake.

An Edge Syntax

Spaces like Rye Lane and the Elephant and Castle endure as an edge, not so much in the sense of a location but rather of a contestation, a set of experiments about claiming and holding onto space through repurposing meanings. On Rye Lane, the hybrid shop interiors combine intermixtures of precarity, dexterity, opportunism, and a litmus-like response to the needs and desires of time and place. The street, unlike the shopping center, is a disaggregated composition, under neither singular ownership nor corporate control, where a bits-and-pieces urbanism is possibly more porous to improvisation, though not impervious to regeneration. Because city-making in the edge territories of cities throughout the United Kingdom has been forged by long histories of migration, edge emporiums necessarily incorporate conjoined vocabularies of streets and markets across space, invoking affinities for highly social modes of exchange and adaptation. The edge emerges, then, as a lively space formed in and through the rewiring of the circuits of value, incorporating an Esperanto of both near and far worlds. Its evolving spatial grammar serves to circumvent property values and planning systems alike, and its densely invested interiors are a form of everyday cultural politics, sustained in the frictions and promises of interaction and expression.

The inhabitants of the edge invest in adaptations, sustained through a collage of paraphernalia and intention and rough-and-ready alterations, incorporating what Ash Amin and Michele Lancione articulate as "multiple sources of authority" (see editors' introduction to this book). Adaptation is

not limited to being a responsive practice, but instead is an alternative resumption to claiming space through vocabularies that are simultaneously audacious and commonplace. One source of this authority is temporal: city-making at the edge is inherently emergent and therefore neither invested in a nostalgia for the past nor contemplating a future rendered as replacement. City-making's day-to-day authority can only exist through constant negotiation. Another source of this authority is material: it emerges through the expressive and immediate potential of moving and shaping of walls, objects, and thresholds that refer to grounded needs, rather than through the abstract grammar of action plans, vision statements, and projections. Authority is also collaborative, in which coalitions are frequently operationalized through spatial and sensory infrastructure. In tracing the formations of Black music in systems of racialized oppression, Katherine McKittrick engages with how music is a way of re*wording*, exploring how "inequitable systems of knowledge can be, and are, breached by creative human aesthetics" (McKittrick 2016, 81). The claiming of space on Rye Lane and at the Elephant and Castle is in practical terms a prosaic attention to the limits of available space, but in human terms is a re*forming* of the extant reality of exclusion and of the emergent possibility of space to affirm one's place in the world. Claiming, rewording, and reforming are conscious and emotive assertions of the right to difference forged in forms that are temporal, material, and collaborative.

How might *grammars of the urban ground* help us think more about processes of listening to the city—at, from, and through the edge? On reflection, perhaps some of the grammars we have engaged with in our research over the years are an illusion, in that they look to the ground in order to look to the authority of power. My sense is that our offerings are more compelling when they have stayed attached to the street, where we've taken time to detail its vocabularies and even worked within collectives that have long ties with respecting the nuances of everyday life in these violent times. From here the elemental syntax of recognition and redistribution needs to be called on insistently, proclaiming strong commitments to the elemental values of life within the fragile promise of secure place. With this comes an understanding of the edge as audacious, inventive, and relevant. I am struck by the emerging efforts of courageous and creative activists and "researchers" (for want of a better word) who in spirited ways stay grounded, working through rich collaborations, asserting their voice, and exploding the limited formats of prescriptive language.

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