

[Suzanne Hall](#)

Visualising difference: picturing a multi-ethnic street

Working paper

Original citation:

Hall, Suzanne (2010) *Visualising difference: picturing a multi-ethnic street*. Researching the spatial and social life of the city, 1 . pp. 49-65.

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/41635/>

Originally available from [LSE Cities](#)

Available in LSE Research Online: February 2012

© 2010 The Author

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

3

VISUALISING DIFFERENCE:
PICTURING A MULTI-ETHNIC STREET

Suzanne Hall

Introduction

The discussion that follows emerges from an empirical exploration of how difference and sociability manifest in the constellation of spaces that make up the Walworth Road in South London. A primary challenge in exploring this multi-ethnic street lies in how to see and represent difference; how to understand and capture the composite and shifting relationships between individuals and groups from the vantage point of everyday life on the Walworth Road. A local resident aptly described the Walworth Road as, 'A road between other places.' This key quality of *being between* provides a crucial direction for my exploration: both of a space neither of the centre nor the margins of contemporary London; and of overlapping societies captured neither by a static view of the remnants of Walworth's working-class residents fixed by location or community, nor by a segregated view of its diverse people divided on the basis of origin or race. In this paper, I focus on the possibilities of a 'spatial methodology' for exploring difference as the aggregation of a myriad of individuals and groups within the spaces of the street. What a 'spatial methodology' is, and specifically how we explore and represent spaces through a visual language, is the central concern of this paper.

The focus of my research came to be the small independent shops along the mile length of the Walworth Road and the social interactions between proprietors and customers within them. I spent many months watching and learning over my plate of egg and chips in 'Nick's Caff', and amongst the mod suits at 'Reyd's Bespoke Tailor Shop'.¹ While absorbed in the microcosms of local life, I also spent time walking the Walworth Road, searching for ways of understanding the layers of place, time and experience that makes this street. As an architect, I brought with me a fascination for how urban space is designed and appropriated, and a predilection for reading the city through a visual language. As an inexperienced ethnographer, I had to learn about a slower way of seeing, making time to sit, listen and talk. My research process has therefore been shaped by the question of how to combine my architectural and ethnographic approaches to understanding the ways in which people use and shape urban space.

My research interest is the range of social interactions between individuals and groups on the Walworth Road, and I therefore started my empirical research with a place, rather than with a selection of people. Although this is contrary to many seminal ethnographies that explore particular social groups in the street setting (Whyte, 1943; Liebow, 1967; Anderson, 1999; Duneier, 1999), I had no specific, identifiable group on the Walworth Road to begin with. At the most obvious level, had I elected to focus on a particular group on the basis of age, class, race, gender, kin or profession, how would I then develop an understanding of the relationships *between* diverse individuals and groups and the experiences of how different people interact *with respect to one another*? Equally, if I contained my unit of analysis to the street as a limited stretch of physical space within a local area, how would I explain the street's connection with the city, and with people and places beyond the city?

From the outset, I found it difficult to define an explicit social group or a contained spatial area as a unit of research. In this paper I explore ways of understanding the composite aggregations of groups and spaces on the Walworth Road, and focus on the visual modes of representing these complex relationships. Through observations of the street collected over one year of fieldwork, I use an ethnographic lens as my primary process of finding out and of arriving at a picture. My process of exploring a multi-ethnic street through the use of pictures, is developed in this paper in three sections, focusing on *juxtaposition, collage and layering*:

- *Juxtaposition*, as the exploration of the relationships between apparently unlike conditions, aiming to understand how the Walworth Road 'fits' between the global and local, and the urban centre and urban margin;

- *Collage*, as the overlap of cultures, viewed through the combination of activities and spaces expressed within the arrangement of the small shops and shop fronts; and
- *Layering*, encapsulating how space is differentiated by regular patterns of use, such as fluctuations across the times of the day, or layering of space by public and private expressions.

These techniques for creating visual images are explored in this paper as ways of analysing social and spatial forms and processes. The discussion is organised around pictures I made of the street that aim not simply to record or represent, but to explore these social spaces and the connections that shape them.

Juxtaposition

Juxtapose: 'to place two or more things together, especially in order to suggest a link between them or to emphasise the contrast between them.' (Encarta Dictionary, 2008)

There is a valuable body of literature that points us towards how to conceptualise difference in the context of a dynamic and disparate global world. Sassen (2001) emphasises the relationship between place, practice and production in the hierarchical organisation of space in the global economy. She identifies, 'a new geography of centres and margins' (2001, p. 4); both the centrality of global cities in the process of economic globalisation, as well as a juxtaposition within the city of prestigious, service-oriented spaces of international finance, and marginal spaces occupied by those who have difficulty in accessing this formal sector. While global cities concentrate these stratifications of urban economies and places, Sassen argues for the need to understand the localisation of these marginal spaces and processes, moving away from the conceptualisation of 'otherness' (as immigration or ethnicity, for example) to 'newness'. Here the urban margins and its work environments represent potential spaces of overlap, where a diverse collection of entrepreneurial and social skills intersect, and new urban cultures emerge.

The conceptual importance of juxtaposition is to explore the relationship between unlike conditions, rather than to emphasise their separate distinctions. The methodological significance bears on the question of how to juxtapose conditions, such as global and local, centre and margin or insider and outsider. During the course of my fieldwork, most particularly during the intense periods of observation, I came to think of the Walworth Road as a social and spatial labyrinth, the complexity of which was initially obscured by first impressions that had been informed largely by its visual surfaces; a one-dimensional reading of the street contained by my own aesthetic prejudice. The density of networks and connections, legitimate and illicit ways of being, entrepreneurial pursuits and the ongoing maintenance of a plethora of daily routines all happen behind the layer of what appears at first glance.

While these vital invisibilities are often obscure in any social space, they seemed increasingly significant for reaching an understanding of the Walworth Road, since its visual legibility is without the dominant repertoire of flagship stores, high street brand-names, or recognisable public spaces. On the basis of visual recognition or lack thereof, it is probably easy to overlook or stereotype streets like the Walworth Road, without understanding their particular local, urban and global roles. In spite of my ethnographic focus on individuals and small spaces, I found it necessary to juxtapose the Walworth Road with a larger context, starting first with the Walworth area and its relationship between north and south London. To understand the diverse nature of the shop spaces along the street, it also became important to juxtapose these small, local spaces with other spatial understandings that proprietors and customers had carried with them on their journeys between the Walworth Road and their places of origin across the globe.

The Walworth Road may well be a commonplace London Street, not unlike Wright's (1991) descriptions of the ordinary spaces and surfaces that layered Dalston Lane, or Massey's (1994) account of the assorted intersections of cultures on Kilburn High Road. Aside from these shared features of ordinariness and diversity, what these streets also broadly represent is a particular symbolic relationship to London: one of simultaneous physical proximity to the centre, and a cultural distinction from it. Walworth is located in South London, and while it is a place from which one can hear the chimes of Big Ben, or catch glimpses of the London Eye, it remains peculiarly distinguished from the perceived centre of London only a mile and a half to the north of it. Although this street provides a direct physical connection to the centre and its prestigious landscape, represented by the symbolic prominence of landmarks like St Paul's Cathedral or the 'Gherkin' (30 St Mary's Axe), its cultural resonance remains more local, where landmarks include the East Street market, and a scattering of local places including pubs, caffs, churches.

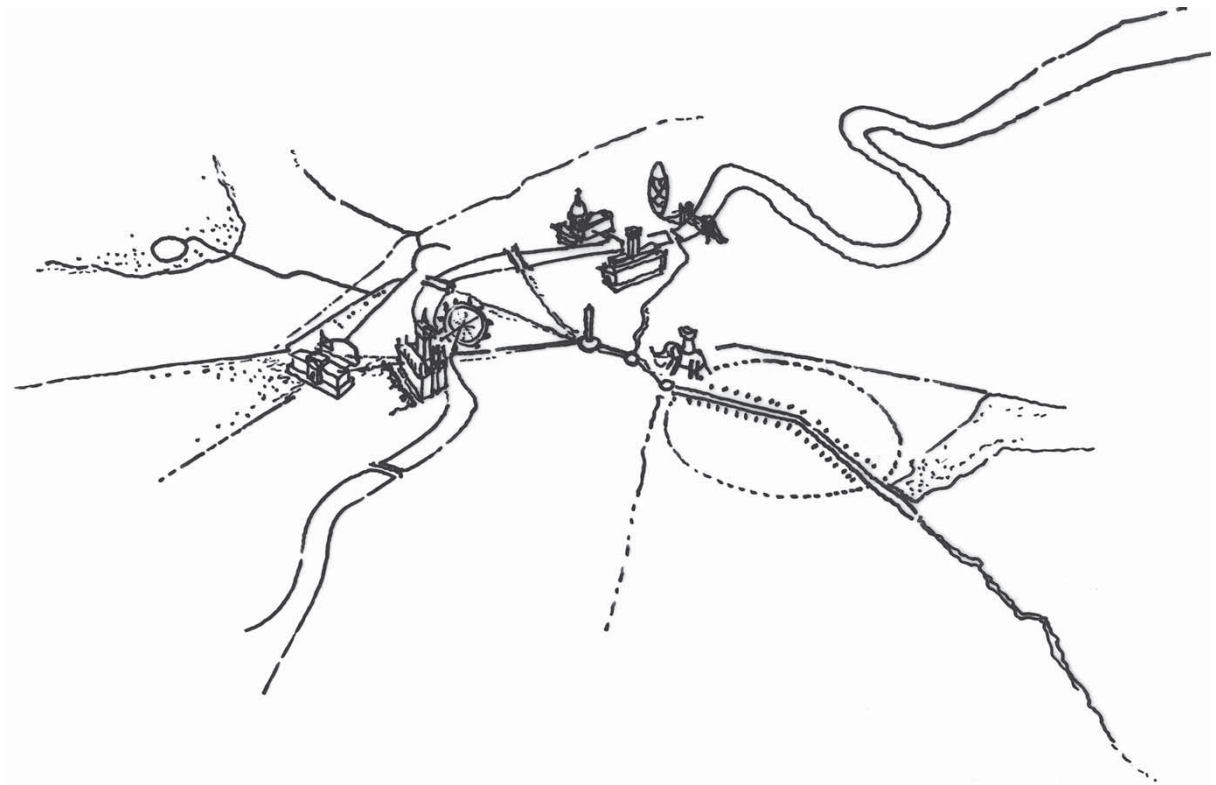


Figure 1. The juxtaposition of centres and margins: Walworth Road in relation to Central London (Suzanne Hall, 2006).

During and after the fieldwork period, I faced the question of whether the particular modes of interaction and enterprise evident in a range of different shop spaces along the Walworth Road, had emerged out of the particularity of its 'marginal' urban setting, in-between central London to the north and the suburbs to the south. Did this kind of urban space, historically near to yet perceptually separate from central London, contain both the limits and opportunities of working within the interstices of the city, a place with its own distinct social codes and patterns of spatial organisation? This relates to the question of whether the innovative and agile spaces suggested by Sassen's 'margin' relate to the potential significance of in-between places like the Walworth Road, and particularly whether these interstitial spaces where difference and change are concentrated are places of both cultural encounter and adaptability. As small spaces adjacent to a public street, the range of independent shops provided a

highly variegated collective research unit to observe not only the social forms of engagement between different individuals and groups, but also the highly responsive spatial modifications to difference and change, made by both proprietors and customers over time. To address these questions I began to explore, and to picture, how remnants of white working-class culture juxtapose with a variety of cultures brought from across the globalising world.

At its most basic explanatory level, Figure 2 is an image of the origins of the independent shop owners along the mile length of the Walworth Road. This image emerged after a face-to-face survey that a colleague and I undertook a few months into my fieldwork in 2006. We spent two weeks walking the Walworth Road, I took the east side, Thresh took the west, and we recorded every unit along the street. Clutching our clip boards, and armed with our inexperience, we stepped into each independent shop to explain our task, and to ask three short questions of the respective proprietors: 'How long has this shop been on the Walworth Road?'; 'Is the shop owned or rented?'; and 'What is the country that you were born in?' Of the three questions, the one least readily answered related to ownership. To my surprise, a reluctance to answer any of the questions occurred in only a few cases, where either the proprietor was 'away' or the proprietor was 'too busy' and declined to answer. In most instances, the proprietor, a family member or an associate was available, and we generally had a five-minute period of grace in which to interrupt the entrepreneurial rhythm.



Figure 2. The juxtaposition of global and local: A map of Walworth Road aligned with a map of the world, showing the origins and journeys of the independent shop owners (Suzanne Hall, 2006).

Important spatial and social cues for further research could be gleaned from this initial survey. At a local level, we learnt that there was a total of 227 units along the mile length of the street. While these units were predominantly retail, they included a small scattering of public buildings and services, such as the Newington Public Library, the Cummings Museum and the Walworth Clinic. Most shop fronts ranged from approximately 4.5 metres wide for a single unit, to approximately 9 metres for a double unit, indicating the comparatively small scale and density of the units that make up this retail strip. Over sixty per cent of the retail units were independent shops: they neither belonged to a chain nor franchise, and in most cases during our survey the proprietor was directly engaged in the shop activities. We also learnt that of the 130-odd independent shops, there were over twenty different countries of origin amongst the proprietors, with no single place of origin predominating.

At this point I was ready to make an image of our survey; one that would juxtapose the map of the Walworth Road with the map of the World, and trace the links between the two, by relating the proprietor's shop unit on the Walworth Road with her or his place of birth. Looking back on the image a year and a half later, a number of different relationships now seem more evident within this representation. I now see an image of classification, driven perhaps by too much of a concern with where people have come from. The more crucial research question ties to how proprietors' origins, their understanding of space, social etiquette and entrepreneurial skill merge with their lives within their respective places of work. Also partly evident is a map of empire, reflected in the high proportion of the proprietors' countries of origin that are former colonies of Britain. Because this image has flattened out different time periods to equate to the present, it represents a singular moment, and questions around the speed and scale of change, and what impetus these have on our experiences of change, are not directly prompted. The combined maps relates the 'third world' or 'developing world' to the Walworth Road, and ties places in Africa, the Middle East and the east to microcosms on this London street. While South America would have featured prominently on this map should I have stretched the survey to include the Elephant and Castle proprietors, North America and Western Europe are largely absent from the pin-point origins marked on this world map. This provokes questions of not only why certain individuals and groups land up in or go to certain places in the city, but why they might remain there over long periods of time.

The confluence of origins, colonial pasts and disparate global development are some of the historic and contemporary themes of migration and diaspora that emerge when focusing on the places identified on the two maps. However, pin-pointing fulfils only one convention of map-reading, and involves locating and orienting oneself by finding markers or places on a map. If we were to read the map like a traveller, then our attention would shift to the distance between places, and the journey needed to undertake a particular route. By shifting focus to the plethora of orthogonal lines that criss-cross between the map of the Walworth Road and the world, questions emerge as to how these multiple crossings and connections are experienced. How do people manage their journeys between familiar and unfamiliar worlds, and develop their lives and aspirations across these global and local 'scapes'? To focus on what kind of place and what kind of sociability emerges from these dense intersections of difference on the Walworth Road is to explore the in-between: the process of crossing; the convergence at the shared spaces of intersection; and the effort and imagination required to travel across geographic and temporal distance and personal familiarity.

Collage

Collage: 'the art of making pictures by sticking cloth, pieces of paper, photographs, and other objects onto a surface; a combination of different things.' (Encarta Dictionary, 2008)

Bhabha (2004[1994]) focuses on the city as a place of gathering, but frames the city as a postcolonial meeting ground of populations spread across the world by processes of migration and diaspora. He highlights the possibilities of inter-cultural relationships, through 'hybrid' forms of living and expression that are vitalised by ongoing interaction and exchange. He also stresses the significance of the margin or 'border' space, by recognising the role of migrants and minorities in developing different ways of belonging within and amongst civil society. Where Sassen highlights the crucial significance of 'place' in understanding how 'the global is localised', Bhabha points us to the importance of 'voice', and how narration or individual stories reveal both the expression of 'personhood' as well as the exchange of ideas. My methodological challenge was to find ways of looking at and showing these different voices and expressions of hybridity, from signage to shop activities, to social spaces claimed by individuals and groups. Sandhu's (2004) analysis of how Black and Asian writers have imagined London makes valuable connections between city space, experience and forms of expression. He describes the terrain in which these authors were working as the 'less-exalted' parts of the city, and emphasises how much of the social life within these worlds was 'tucked away'. From this urban context he links mixed ways of life and composite representations of life, through modes of collecting, combining, mixing and layering: 'juxtaposition and collage are the ideal aesthetic modes for incarnating this higgledy-piggledy commotion of a metropolis.' (2004, p. 259).

I explore the idea of hybrid space both through how shop spaces along the Walworth Road are collaged by the skill and acumen of their respective proprietors, as well as using the collage as a method of representing these mixed spaces. It would be misleading to isolate the space of the small, independent shops along the Walworth Road from the street, just as it would be simplistic to separate out the shops from other adjacent uses. Here street life is an amalgamation of formal public life within institutional buildings like the library and churches, informal public life on the pavement and within spaces like the East Street market, and domestic life occurring in the three to four floors above the line of shops. What serves to distinguish the spatial aspect of the shop from these other formal and informal spaces, and hence its distinctive forms of social life, is that it sits between a public and private realm, a space in-between the life on the street and the life in the domestic interior. Yet another important way the small independent shop space falls between a public and private realm is as privately owned or rented space, dependent on engagement with the public for its survival and vitality. In this respect it becomes essential to understand the role of the proprietor in articulating this intermediate space, through the imagination and acumen employed in attracting a customer base, while asserting a personal identity in the place of her or his work.

Both customers and proprietors along the Walworth Road represent a wide array of cultural differences, and the ways in which these differences are managed within these shop spaces is evident in various forms of social engagement, one dimension of which is the visual sequence of display. The visual arrangement of shop signage and shop front, and the flow into the spatial arrangement of public and personal items within the shop, distinguishes each shop. In only a few cases, the merchandise was the most prominent expression of the space, where the arrangement of items was contrived primarily to effect purchase, an organisation of retail space by item-to-shelf sequence, a product-oriented shop identity. In many other cases, shop identity took on a combination of explicitly cultural and personal identities. In one Halal butchery and convenience shop for example, the space was divided into two areas: the first, closest to the street, included a range of food products and the meat counter; while the second space, further from the street, stocked food goods more oriented to North African and Muslim

customers. In this second space were pictures of Mecca and a small prayer area. This proprietor, who had recently come from Sudan, promoted his primary public display, or his street frontage, through signage in both Arabic and English, using a selection of words aimed at including a wide customer base, 'Absar Food Store. Halal butchers and Grocery. Afro Caribbean and Mediterranean Fresh Fruit and Veg'.

Other shop signage along the Walworth Road also represented a similar desire to reach a diverse customer base, sometimes expressed with humour such as, 'Mixed Blessings Bakery. West Indian and English Bread'. Cultural amalgamation was not the only mode of hybridity that these signs represented, and signage such as, 'Roze and Lawanson Nigerian Market. Money Transfer. Wedding Garments', and, 'Afroworld Food Store. Cosmetics, wigs and fruit and veg' alludes to the curious combinations of merchandise and services offered within these independent shops. Sometimes the space within the shop was divided into distinctly different functions, and it was not uncommon to see small spaces of approximately 1 metre by 2 metres within the shop front area, used for purposes such as tailoring and mending or phone card sales.



Figure 3. An assemblage of the hybrid shops signs on the Walworth Road (Suzanne Hall, 2008).

Research pictures that were made from a collage of street images became an important tool for showing the range of shops along the Walworth Road. I faced the challenge of how to group shops to analyse their cultural significance, without reverting to strict classification for example by ethnicity or product type. The collage provided a mode of simultaneously grouping and combining shops, for example of grouping retail types within a broader combination of the retail activities that most prominently represented the Walworth Road.



Figure 4. The appendage of the 1metre by 1metre phone shop within a larger convenience shop (Suzanne Hall, 2008).

From a use and activity perspective, what was apparent along the Walworth Road was the predominance of food shops, both of the retail and restaurant type. Cheap or bargain merchandise, most evidently clothing, was the second most prominent form of retail, followed by assortments of inexpensive household goods, including a number of different charity shops.

There were also a number of jewellers and pawnshops, as well as betting shops, and banks set up to cash cheques and provide short-term loan arrangements. Since the period of my survey in 2006, there was a significant increase in shops dealing in beauty products, particularly in hair and nail products and services. What remained consistently apparent during my research period is the spatial pattern of a predominantly retail street lined with small-scale increments of shop space, generally of narrow frontage, always limited to the ground floor, and with a spatial arrangement of identity revealed in the items and sequence of display. Significantly, this spatial pattern could be understood as a basic framework for subjectivity; a combination of entrepreneurial, cultural and social expressions, within

a pattern of shops along the street where there is also the opportunity for an engagement directed towards the variegated street society in which they are active citizens. Working from the base of the verbal and visual survey the key question becomes to what extent social interaction occurs in these retail spaces beyond the surfaces of cultural mix alluded to in the street signage and displays of merchandise? Are there degrees of interaction between proprietors and customers within these small shops that range from shared conversations, to shared sensibilities, projects and friendships?



Figure 5. A collage of a range of retail groupings on the Walworth Road (Suzanne Hall, 2008).

Layering

Layer: 'to apply or arrange things in overlapping sections.' (Encarta Dictionary, 2008)

From a methodological standpoint, the visual and verbal surveys and semi-structured interviews that I conducted broadly outlined the range of social relationships between proprietors and customers across the spectrum of the street. However the depth and substance of these social interactions within the shop spaces escaped the survey format, and were only partially suggested in the informal interviews that I held with a number of proprietors of the independent shops. Researching social interaction through its dimensions of regularity, repetition and face-to-face encounters calls for empirical exploration that depends on sustained observation over long time-periods. While involved in a visual and verbal survey of the Walworth Road, I undertook an ethnographic exploration of two of the small independent shops along the street, namely 'Nick's Caff' and 'Reyd's Bespoke Tailor shop'. I explored how to make images of these spaces that would reveal the integral patterns of user groups, and how different interactions occurred within the layers of time and space. My first entry point and base for participant-observation was in Nick's Caff, a small meeting place off the Walworth Road that I had used prior to my research. Nick's Dad immigrated to London from Cyprus in the 1950s and bought the caff in the 1960s, having worked his way up to sous chef at the Trocodero Restaurant in central London. Although Nick and his wife Dorah have parents of Cypriot origin, they were both born and grew up in the local Walworth area.

The emergence of the London caff required the symbiosis of at least two cultures to forge its qualities for a particular kind of meeting and eating in the city: the initiation of a casual and affordable eating establishment brought largely by Italian immigrants to London in the 1950s; and the take-up of a local, sociable place by the working-class to eat home-cooked food away from home (Heathcoate, 2004). The London caff has emerged across cultural imaginations, and across the Formica tables and accompaniments of malt vinegar and brown sauce it has come to include other immigrant and minority groups, including Greek, Turkish and Cypriot proprietors, and customers from a changing working-class, and from changing local areas. While the loss of public space as places for different people to engage beyond a visual encounter features prominently in writings about the contemporary western city (Sennett, 1992[1977], 1996) others have pointed to the location of the activity of meeting between cultures away from such overt public spaces to the smaller spaces of regular engagement, including schools, workplaces and youth clubs (Amin, 2002). It is in these interstitial spaces, neither overtly public nor private, Bhabha argues, that inter-cultural social life can be accommodated and experienced.

To relegate Nick's Caff solely to the status of an eating establishment would be to overlook its significant role as a local meeting place, situated between the public street and his family's home above the shop. The caff provides a base to consider the complexities of how different people belong by coming together in the city; it is a local place that born-and-bred locals and a range of newcomers use on a regular basis and its sociability extends from the solidarity of an extended family of relatives and friends to the singular practices of diverse individuals. The caff has a fairly old fashioned interior, and feels almost as if one is stepping into the 1960s, when Nick's Dad bought the caff and named it '*The Istanbul*'. There are 16 tables comprised of four unequal rows and a clear designation through routine and preference of who uses which table. Family and regulars sit up front furthest from the street, while people who come to the caff for a meal or company, but prefer less engagement, tend to sit at the sides. This is generally where I sit, with my back to the street so that I have a full view of the caff but from where, behind my book or cup of coffee, I feel less conspicuous.

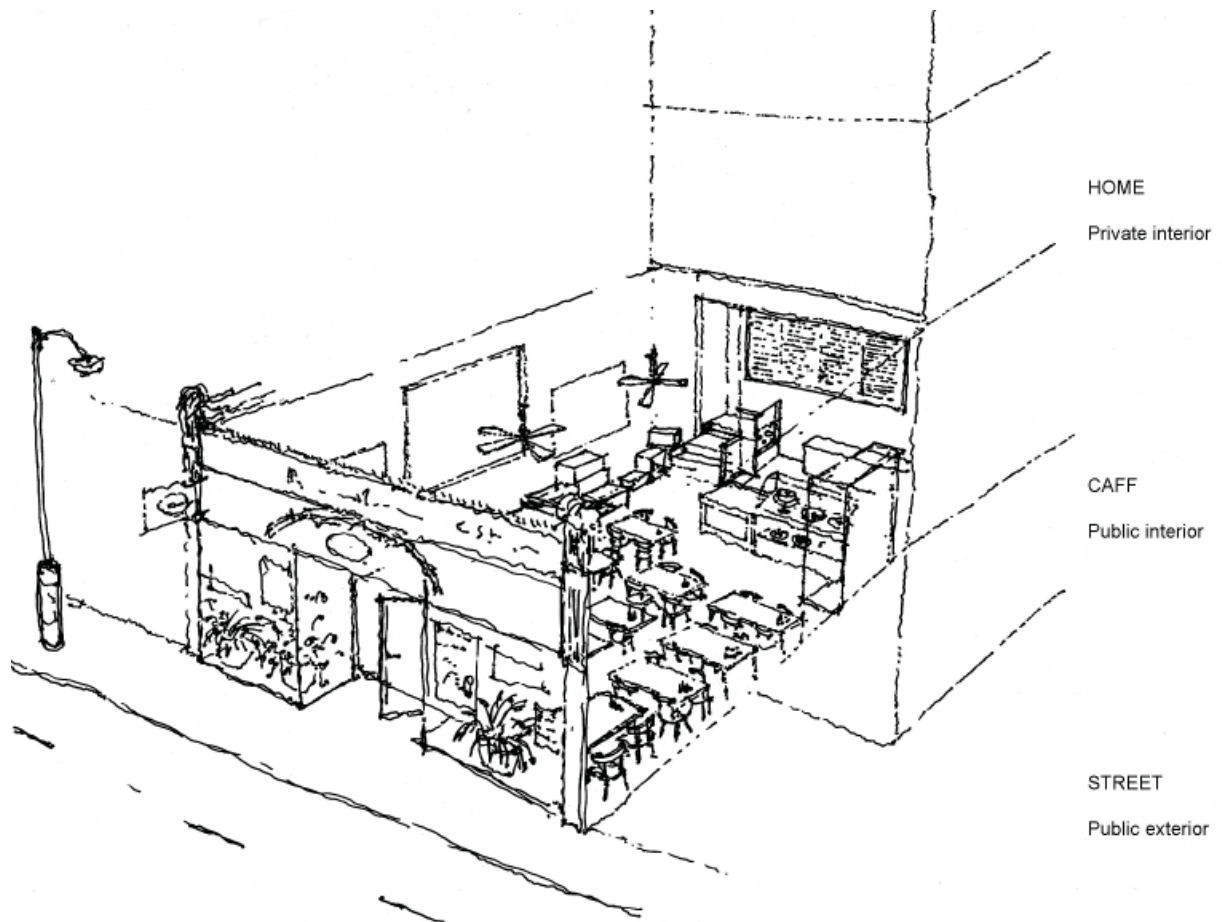


Figure 6. 'Nick's Caff', a space between the street and the home above the shop (Suzanne Hall, 2007).

The caff opens by seven in the morning and closes approximately twelve hours later. It is open seven days a week, closing earlier on Sundays before lunch. The combination of regular opening and extended open hours provides a local place that is consistently available to its customers. The rhythm of the caff across the day brings both moments of intensity and relative quiet, a fluctuation in the space in its peak periods compared with its quieter moments. The first customers of the weekday are generally those on their way to work, either stopping in briefly for a takeaway or a quick breakfast at a table. Around ten the caff begins to fill, mostly with construction workers off sites in the area as well people from local workshops and small industries. Lunchtime introduces the third set of regulars, workers from local offices, shops and institutions. The frenzy subsides after lunch, and the odd person pops in for tea and late lunch or early dinner. Local shop workers come in and out during the day. Around five in the afternoon, the daily evening regulars settle in around the two family tables up front. They sit there until Nick and Dorah close up around seven in the evening. Aside from Nick and Dorah's family, this group also includes Sonja, who was born and grew up in Walworth, and Sonja's daughter and grandson who sometimes hauls his homework out onto the table, as if an extension of his home. Mike often strolls across from his flat in the sheltered housing for the elderly, accommodation that Nick helped him to secure. He regularly joins this extended 'family', dismissing the people at the sheltered housing with an irritated flick, and asserting, 'This is where my friends are.'

Aside from the regular groups who use the caff, there are individuals who frequent the caff as part of their weekly routine. People working away from home, like Dave, use the caff periodically when they work in London, where they can be assured of a home-cooked meal and the familiar comforts of a

traditional caff. Pensioners also have their regular slots, many coming in the morning for a cup of tea, some coming in for a hot meal at lunch or dinner. Mark, who is self-employed and a confessed late riser, generally comes in around eleven, reads a paper, does a bit of business, and orders the same cooked breakfast. He mostly sits on his own, at a side table facing the street. He tells me that the caff is the place, 'where I do my thinking.' Hinga, who left Sierra Leone twelve years ago, started coming to the caff during my fieldwork. He quietly slips into the caff at the same time most mornings and sits upfront, close to Nick. He orders the same items on the menu, tea and toast, not really making eye contact, glancing up to watch the telly and occasionally talking to Nick. Hinga doesn't partake in any of the general conversations, and he doesn't conform to any particular groups and sub-cultures in the caff. But Nick's is one of Hinga's local places and he reserves his place through the regular act of sitting.

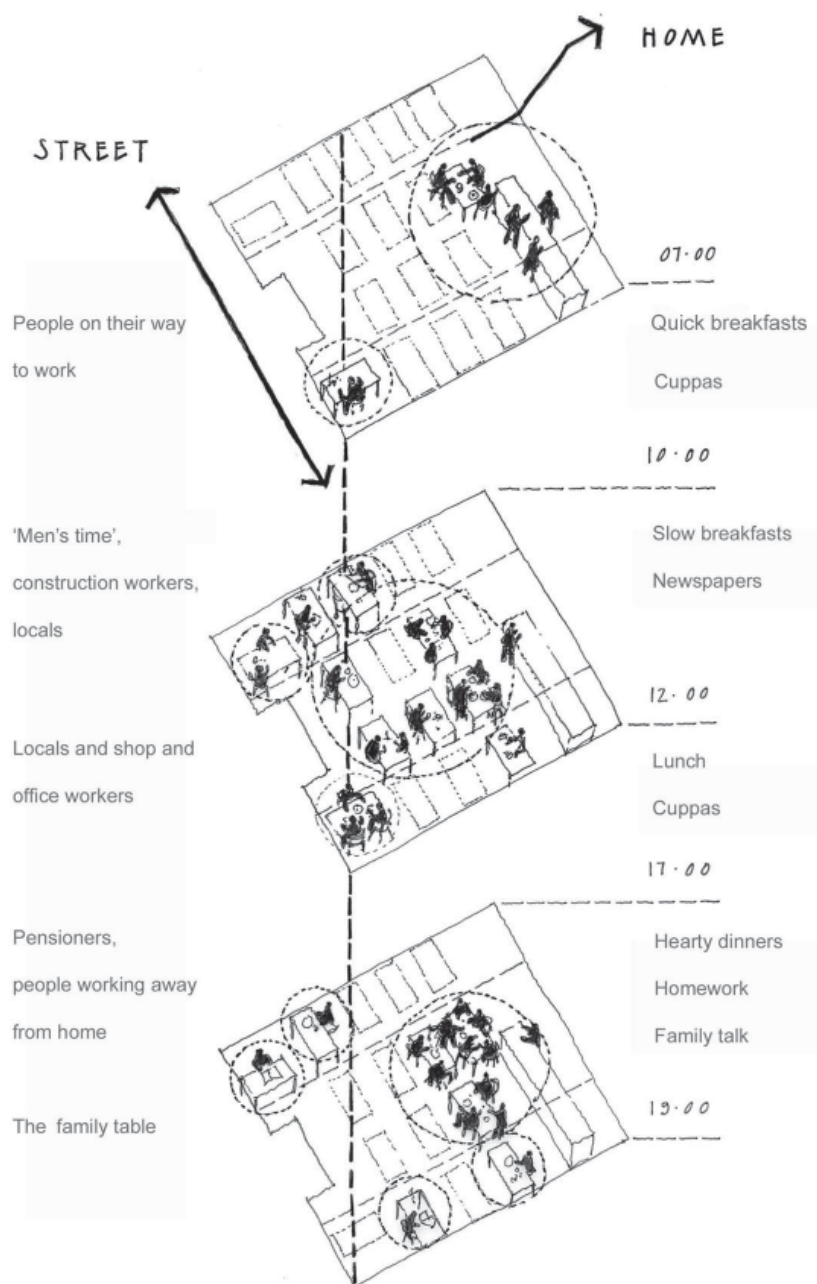


Figure 7. The layers of time and activity in Nick's Caff. Difference is accommodated in rhythms of time across the day as well as patterns of use (Suzanne Hall, 2008).

Over the ten months of my observation in the caff it became clear that Nick's was used as a social space by a diverse range of individual and groups, and their respective sociabilities within the single space of the caff was orchestrated through nuanced appropriations or 'layers' of space and time. Individual preferences for more public or private positions were displayed through the regular occupation of side tables or spaces closest to the street or to the counter. In addition some visited the caff during peak periods, whilst other always came during quieter intervals, so that the space felt quite different during the peak breakfast period at ten, than it did an hour later when there was often a pause between breakfast and lunch. The positions of the tables, the defined area of the table as a personal space, and the fluctuating use of the space throughout the rhythm of the day all defined personal territories within the larger space of the caff. Through these smaller terrains it is possible to belong differently: either without explicit interaction, or with talk limited across the table, or by joining in with larger conversations across tables.



Figure 8. The personal scale of table space, layered momentarily by customer activity (Suzanne Hall, 2007).

In Nick's Caff sitting is a social process tied to a local place, where regularity is an important dimension of a basic mode of belonging. Many customers claim this belonging through regular occupation of time and place; sitting in the caff more or less at the same time and mostly in the same place. A further critical dimension of 'caff time' was also the possibility of taking your time. Mustafa, a local pensioner, describes this underlying informality at Nick's Caff: 'Caffs are better than restaurants. Restaurants are very formal. You can take time, eat, have a cigarette. Restaurants you got to eat your food and get out.' This important social component of being able to 'take time', stems partly from

the more common cultural understanding of the role of places like caffs as places to both meet and eat. However it is also reinforced by getting to know the rhythm of a local place, and by avoiding peak periods one is more able to 'take time'. Key to its appropriation by its customers, the caff is a place to go to regularly, either spontaneously or as part of a routine. It is a place where you can do nothing much without any sense of being moved on; there is no required purpose for being there other than placing an order. One may go through the formality of ordering a cup of tea for fifty pence, but more importantly the caff is a space where you can spend time and take your time.

Conclusions

Writing or 'research' is a process of exploration and a process of communication: both a finding out and a revealing. In *Telling about Society*, Becker (2007) raises the issue of the interpretive space created between the writer and the reader, and in the matter of representing society he considers the form and purpose of different modes of telling. What for example is the purpose of the tabular and quantitative regularity of the census table and how might this differ from the way a reader interprets an untitled photograph? Becker introduces the question for the writer of how to create interpretive space, and at what point it becomes appropriate to limit or to expand this space when representing society, through selected modes of representation. In this paper I have explored how to create this interpretive space between reader and writer through the use of pictures made by the researcher during the research process, and I specifically addressed how to write about social difference in the contemporary city through the modes of juxtaposition, collage and layering. Rather than using these three modes simply as visual categories or as a means of composing the images for a communicative purpose, they have been useful as analytic concepts, where the process of picturing by the researcher can be used in an explanatory sense to potentially expand our understanding of the complex compositions of social life in a local place. In this approach drawings or pictures are more explicitly related to processes of thought than to representations in the first instance. What these concepts have allowed for is a process of combining different parts, be it the local and global intersections on the Walworth Road, or the hourly intervals of social time in the daily life of Nick's Caff. The purpose of these visual categories and analytic concepts is to both explore and visualise the relationship between entities. Although it took time for me to arrive at these pictures, they also potentially serve to communicate, quite quickly, the complexity of social and spatial forms and processes.

My unit of analysis became the 'everyday street', where the first phrase of this unit - 'everyday' - is intended to incorporate the lived expressions of difference, while the latter - 'street' - is intended to include a variety of spatial connections and intersections between people and between places. Undoubtedly, ways of seeing that I had developed as an architect accompanied me on what has largely been a journey into a new way of seeing – the ethnographic view. Throughout my research process I have both consciously and inadvertently combined these different ways of exploring and understanding difference, focusing on how difference manifests in its joint social and spatial dimensions. This paper has set about reviewing composite pictures made as one way of exploring how to find out about and communicate difference. I hope to have avoided a representation of norms, classifications and stereotypes, since the multi-ethnic street I have come to know is layered with multiple and complex spaces and interactions. I am mindful that images can serve to limit or direct interpretation by overtly presenting a chosen or mediated view. Where I think pictures or drawings made during research may be most useful is when they reveal a process of thinking or analysis, rather than presenting a singular conclusion, or when, as Becker suggests, the pictures create interpretive space between the writer and the reader, by raising questions and by revealing varied and contingent forms of social expression.

References:

- Amin, A. (2002). Ethnicity and the multiculturalcity: living with diversity. *Environment and Planning A*. 34 pp. 959-980.
- Anderson, E. (1999). *Code of the street: decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Becker, H. S. (2007). *Telling about society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bhabah, H. K. (2004 [1994]). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Duneier, M. (2001). *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Heathcoate, E. (2004). *London caffs*. London: John Wiley and Sons.
- Liebow, E. (1967). *Tally's corner: a study of negro streetcorner men*. Boston MA: Little Brown.
- Massey, D. (1994). *A global sense of place. Space, place and gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 146-156.
- Sandhu, S. (2004). *London calling: how black and asian writers imagined a city*. London: Harper Perennial.
- Sassen, S. (2001). The global city: strategic site/ new frontier, seminar paper, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2001/503>.
- Sennett, R. (1996 [1977]). *The fall of public man*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Sennett, R. (1996). *Flesh and stone: the body and the city in western civilization*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Whyte, W. F. (1943). *Street corner society: the social structure of an Italian slum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wright, P. (1991). *A journey through ruins: the last days of london*. London: Radius.

Endnote

- ¹ Both shop names have been changed in line with the research practice of preserving anonymity.