

# THE INHABITANT



# How Do Inhabitants Negotiate Change? / Jamie Keddie The Inhabitant Through the 'Eye of the Street' / George Azariah-Moreno The 'Empowered' Inhabitant? / Catherine Harrington The Individual Inhabitant / Andrew Rudd

## Who is the inhabitant?

Our study of housing in Southwark began with a tour of Bermondsey by the former head of Southwark Council's regeneration team, who isolated Tanner Street in West Bermondsey as an instance where the existing residents felt besieged by the encroaching professionals or 'gentrifiers'. This 'conceived' notion of the changes in the area was later challenged by a local historian, who emphasised continuities with the past as opposed to stark contrasts: she cited how work had dominated the lives of the former working classes in the area, just as it does the newly-arrived professionals, thereby precluding any effective community involvement. Whilst change in the area had been rapid and the people who lived there had diversified, a sense of community still existed among inhabitants who for differing reasons identified with the area.

These various readings of Tanner Street and its environs resonated with theoretical literature on the city; specifically, the notion that urban space is shaped at various levels through diverse but intersecting processes. Following Crane's (1960) notion of "a city of 1000 designers", we wished to explore further how various conceptions and interpretations of space actively shape housing in Bermondsey. These range from the formal conceptions of space at an official regulatory level, down to the informal use and transformation of space at a street level.

Lefebvre (1991) describes how these multiple layers of urban space are simultaneously produced and practised, and develops 'trialectics' as a way to analyse space and its social effects: perceived space is the physical, material manifestation of space; conceived space refers to the theoretical or professional representation of what space should be; finally lived space is space as directly used and experienced in the everyday by its inhabitants (1991: 38–39). The relationship between the three levels is contested and tensions exist over how space is defined.

What we made of this as a group was that the inhabitant – or the notion of the inhabitant – is constructed at various scales: as a statistical demographic that is seen to change over time; as actors producing a public realm around the street – constituting various degrees of belonging; as small, self-identified groups of residents who ‘empower’ themselves by participating in the management of their affairs; and as individuals with their own lived realities in their respective flats. None of these scales are inherently independent, and so to separate them is in a way quite artificial. However, we felt such a theoretical framework might prove useful in understanding the apparent tensions and spatial complexity in West Bermondsey. Our central premise was therefore to identify the Bermondsey inhabitant by exploring how different social actors conceive of, perceive and live in the same urban spaces. We believed that examining these various scalar moments would, at the very least, reveal something about the slippery nature of urban identities.

1 The scale of the West Bermondsey ‘neighbourhood’, as constituted by ward-level statistical data.

2 The scale of Bermondsey Street, as constituted by residents and their varying degrees of belonging.

3 The scale of the Tenant Management Organisation, Leathermarket Joint Management Board, and its five estates: Kipling Estate, Crosby, Lockyer and Hamilton, Bermondsey Street, Elim Estate and Lawson Estate.

4 The scale of the home, as constituted by individual residents in estates across the neighbourhood.



This section on the inhabitant starts by exploring the contours of changes in West Bermondsey at the level of conceived space. Using statistical analysis of the last three Census returns, it seeks to establish how the demographics of the area's inhabitants have shifted over the past 25 years. It suggests that change has occurred in West Bermondsey at a faster pace than elsewhere in Southwark, and that inhabitants' changing class and housing tenure profile is consistent with gentrification (Butler and Robson 2003). The section then examines what these changes mean for long-term inhabitants of the area. It also questions whether there are tensions between these inhabitants and the more recent arrivals and whether conflict exists over how space is shaped and used.

The view from Bermondsey Street reveals the presence of two seemingly opposed cultural models – those of long-term inhabitants and gentrifying newcomers. On closer inspection, they both appear to contribute to the remaking of West Bermondsey as an emerging 'urban village' and the reversal of a declining and homogenous neighbourhood. Certainly, 'newcomers' break the previous pattern of employment (based around factories) and live in close proximity to long-term inhabitants, placing the two groups in potential conflict. But this generalisation falls apart when more complex local dynamics of community and change are explored.

Decision making in the provision of public services is increasingly being devolved to the 'user' and, in the case of housing, this is the 'inhabitant'. While participation in housing management has a long history, New Labour has recently hailed Tenant Management Organisations as a favoured model of 'empowerment' to extend to other public services (Miliband 2006), in light of its 'extreme' form of devolution and participation (Tunstall 2001: 2504). Through an investigation of a Tenant Management Organisation in West Bermondsey, Leathermarket Joint Management Board (JMB), and a particular moment in the fate of one of the housing blocks, Symington House, the reality of 'empowerment' is explored. The issue of whether Symington House is to be demolished or refurbished brings to the fore the complex power relations between the Council, the JMB and its subsidiary Tenants' and Residents' Associations, and the residents themselves. It questions the use of the term 'empowerment', when real control, particularly over budgets, is not devolved to tenant management organisations.

The final section deals with the perceived and lived spaces of the individual inhabitant. It examines the preferences and choices of specific Bermondsey residents regarding their location, and looks at the ways in which residents have appropriated the spaces designed for them, linking the lived with the conceived. These subjective aspects of their identities are then contextualised within the Census-based demographics of their immediate neighbourhoods. Examining these wider categories into which they might or might not fit – e.g. class and tenure type – afforded a better understanding of the particular subjectivities of their responses.

Ultimately our subject engages all clusters of the larger Cities Programme housing studio, forming the basis of design, policy and development: without the inhabitant there would be no need for housing.



**5** One moment in the physical transformation of Bermondsey: social changes in the aggregate composition of the inhabitant as reflected and reinforced by the built environment; new-build owner flats at left and 1950s social housing at right.

**6** One moment in the 'eye of the street' showing neighbourhood as constituted by passersby of varying appurtenances.

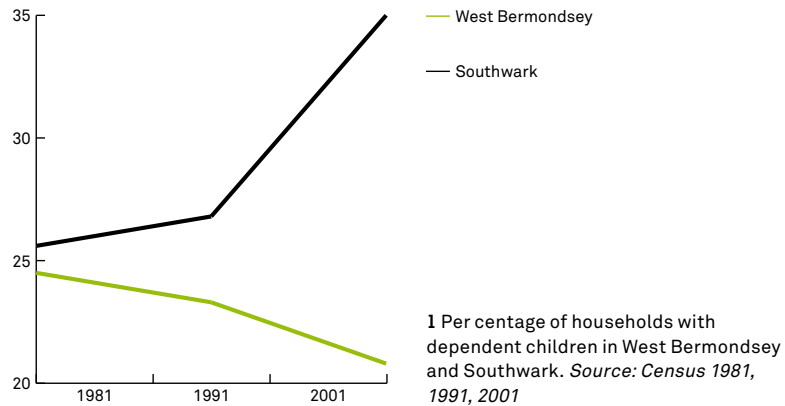
**7** One moment at Crosby, Lockyer and Hamilton Tenants' and Residents' Association meeting, Leathermarket Joint Management Board.

**8** Edith, resident of Nashe House in the Lawson Estate, as reflected in the window of her flat and reflecting on the adjacent school under plans for redevelopment.



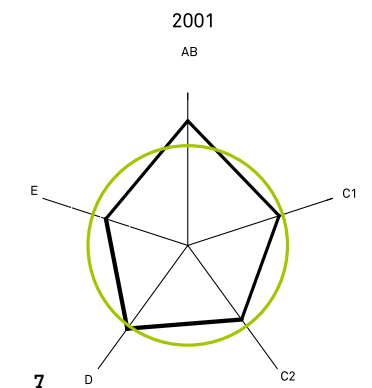
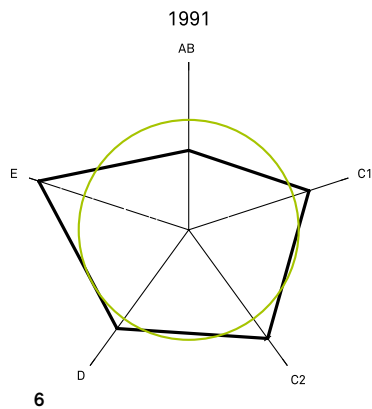
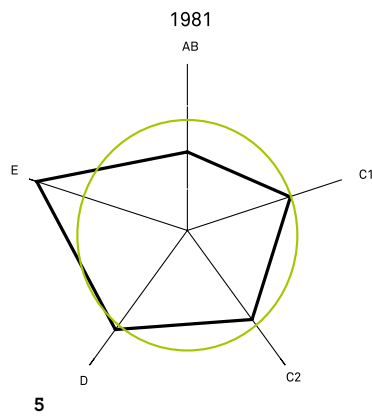
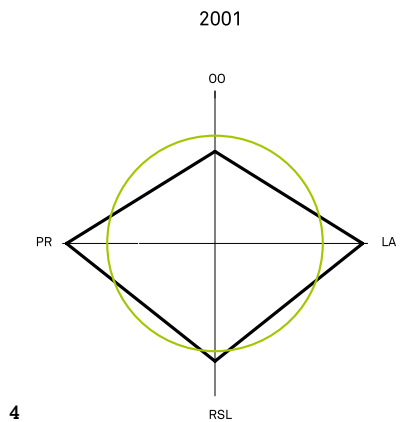
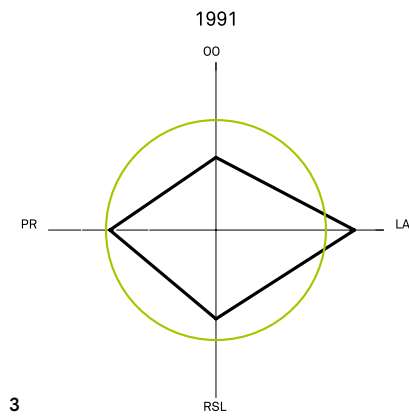
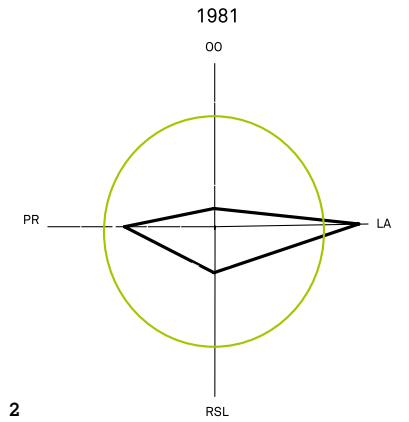
## Negotiating neighbourhood change

A neighbourhood such as West Bermondsey is at the sharp end of social and spatial change. Census data since 1981 show that the typical resident has changed radically: from being overwhelmingly likely to live in a council flat to now occupying a diversity of tenures; from working mainly in unskilled manual occupations to working in managerial or professional jobs; and being much less likely to live with dependant children. What then have these changes meant to inhabitants of Bermondsey? Compared to elsewhere in Southwark, the area has witnessed substantial change in the type of people who live there in terms of tenure, social class and household composition. Changes in the inhabitant profile – consistent with the gentrification process – have been accompanied by changes to the built form. Conspicuous in the area are warehouses converted into high-end apartments offering loft-style living for a gentrifying clientele. More recently, ‘new-build warehouses’ have appeared: housing developments designed to look like they once were industrial buildings, complete with pastiche remnants of an aestheticised heritage. Their referencing of the area’s past – described by Jane Jacobs as ‘architectural antiquarianism’ (Jacobs 1964: 150) – is in marked contrast to the social housing blocks where most long-term residents still live. There appears to be little middle ground in terms of the housing typologies available.



**2-4** Housing tenure in West Bermondsey relative to Southwark. *Source: Census 1981, 1991, 2001*

OO: owner-occupied  
LA: local authority rented  
RSL: RSL rented  
PR: private rented



**5-7** Socio-economic groups in West Bermondsey relative to Southwark. *Source: Census 1981, 1991 and 2001*

AB: Managerial and professional  
C1: Supervisory and clerical  
C2: Skilled manual  
D: Unskilled manual  
E: Lowest grade / unemployed



Another conspicuous change to the area is demonstrated by Bermondsey Street. A once bustling high street, during Bermondsey's post-industrial decline it mainly served as an undistinguished thoroughfare for service vehicles between London Bridge and the Old Kent Road. It now displays a range of sites for gentrifiers' conspicuous consumption: galleries, restaurants, gastro-pubs and boutiques.

Based on these changes, some writers on gentrification may see Bermondsey as a likely site of tensions and even conflict between old and new inhabitants. Betancur (2002) frames these changes as a struggle between contending interests vying for control of a community. Smith (1996) uses similarly stark terms and describes gentrification as a theoretical and ideological battleground, with gentrifiers seeking to recover urban space from the original inhabitants. A more benign view of Atkinson (2003) and Clark (2005) is that the chance of conflict is higher when changes to the built environment as a result of gentrification are more apparent.

Do long-term inhabitants see changes to their area in such stark terms? Has the influx of new, wealthier inhabitants to Bermondsey only had negative effects for long-term inhabitants, or are there some benefits as well? These questions were explored through group interviews with members of the Bermondsey Local History Group. The group comprises Bermondsey inhabitants interested in how their area has changed and in its conservation. Many members had lived in Bermondsey their whole lives and could therefore take a broad perspective on what changes had taken place.

A clear sense of frustration emerged from the interviews over how the neighbourhood was changing, particularly from participants who had lived their whole life there. The frustration was not simply over the fact that change was taking place. Indeed some participants stressed how poor living conditions had been, particularly in the post-War period: 'We had no hot water, no bath . . . one "two-up-two-down" had eleven people living in it'. Rather it was borne of the lack of perceived benefits for long-term inhabitants. This was particularly true for new housing developments, which participants regarded as being out of the reach of most existing Bermondsey inhabitants. One participant referred to the Jam Factory development: 'Most of the women in Bermondsey have worked there at some point and now it's all flats but far too expensive for people round here to afford'.

As well as recognising that very little of the new housing was within the financial reach of most long-term inhabitants, participants reported that some of their peers were moving away from the area. However whether they were being displaced by the higher prices that gentrification brought to the area is less clear. One participant described how his children could not afford to live in Bermondsey so had moved away but stressed that they 'don't want to live here cos they've got us around! They moved to Kent cos that's where they wanted to live'. There is therefore a degree of agency in the decision to move from the area and live elsewhere, with perhaps a cultural trajectory among long-term residents' children to meet their aspirations by moving away from the inner city to the suburbs, in contrast to the middle-class return to the inner city that characterises gentrification (Ley 1994).

Other participants felt that displacement was occurring as a direct result of Southwark Council's housing allocation policy, which does not effectively reflect applicants' preference for where they would like to live and means that accessing social housing often means relocation elsewhere in the borough: 'If you can't get a place round here they end up looking at some other place altogether.' The policy therefore contributes to the breakdown of existing social networks as well as affecting the social composition of the neighbourhood.

Importantly, those who moved away often did so to start a family. This had helped change the composition of the neighbourhood as new inhabitants were thought to be less likely to have children (as borne out by the Census analysis), partly due to the preponderance of one- and two-bedroom flats in new developments. Children were seen as a catalyst for community involvement and concern for the neighbourhood: 'your priorities change when you have kids. You start to think and care about what the local schools are like, what the streets are like'. New residents tended to be transitory and to have different working patterns: 'you can live in the same block and not know anyone. You can come and go and hardly see them'. A lot of these flats are sold to the buy-to-let market which attracts people only likely to stay in the area for a short while.

Concerns were also raised over management – letting agency tenants 'don't abide by the rules' in terms of rubbish disposal and late night noise. Group members were used to very strict LA landlords (reinforced by caretakers) and there was a feeling that new residents were outside this system. Caretakers lived on ground floor on blocks and commanded a great deal of respect: 'they collected rent and the threat of being reported for misbehaviour...we used to take it very seriously'.



Participants traced the decline of the area's sense of community back to the closure of the docks (in the late 1960s) and the loss of the area's industrial base that was fundamental to Bermondsey inhabitants' identity. The balance of the area shifted as new inhabitants arrived – both gentrifiers moving into former industrial buildings, and minority ethnic groups into the social housing left vacant by 'local' inhabitants. Ironically the 'community feel' was seen as one part of West Bermondsey's appeal to gentrifiers: 'they like the way this area's got its own identity – you're right in the centre of London but it still feels like a community'. However none of the participants felt there was much mixing between new and long-term inhabitants.

The former industrial buildings in Bermondsey such as the Jam Factory represented for older participants a symbolic link to the past. The general trend of converting rather than demolishing existing buildings that had lost their original use was strongly supported by participants. However the conversion of buildings that were still in use was a further cause of consternation. For example, several pubs in recent years have been converted into flats, with their loss seen as another break with Bermondsey's former identity: 'we used to find our way around by the pubs, in the past ten years they've been converted everywhere'. Pubs served as spatial markers as well as the frequent focus of social activity – they outlined the neighbourhood and were used to navigate it: 'people would ask for directions and round here with the narrow streets you'd use the pubs to tell them what way to go'. There was anger that their view of pubs as integral to the area's history and identity was not considered when conversions were granted planning permission.

In terms of neighbourhood amenities, there was frustration that while new developments often included welcomed retail space (such as Tabard Square), they were seen as targeted at gentrifiers with little of use for long-term residents: 'It's all estate agents, employment agencies now, no shops for us or anything we want to use'. With new developments, planning gain was often provided for the benefit of the local community (for example, a new hotel on Bermondsey St will have a pool for local residents to access). However participants described being 'stitched up' by the way planning gain was applied. A pool in the Guy's Hospital complex is theoretically available for local residents, but it was seen as prohibitively expensive (needing an annual membership, plus the cost per visit) and local concessions were 'deliberately' not publicised. Also when Bermondsey Abbey was excavated and built into flats, a condition was that the archaeological finds would be visible to the public, however they are located in an expensive restaurant and only when this is open can access be arranged. The long-term inhabitants felt excluded from the benefits that the new inhabitants' wealth could bring.

## Conclusion

Longitudinal Census data point to significant changes in the West Bermondsey inhabitants' housing and socio-economic profile. These changes are consistent with those brought about by gentrification and an influx of middle-class professionals to a traditionally working-class area. During interviews with long-term inhabitants, it was clear that new housing developments in an already dense and compact area were seen as a potential threat; the new type of inhabitants they appealed to were less interested in contributing to the very community that, ironically, had partly attracted them to the area.

While those interviewed did not feel resentful of the newcomers in Bermondsey, there was frustration at their disengagement from the process of change going on around them. This may partly be a product of nostalgia, with older participants using collective memories to present the past as cohesive and reinforce a negative view of a fragmented present (Blokland 2003). Even so, the participants' views reflect tensions between long-term residents and newcomers, perhaps due to different motives for being in the area and different uses of the neighbourhood. For long-term residents the use of the neighbourhood has a symbolic and a practical purpose; their social networks and everyday activities are largely confined to the area, and the built environment contained memories of their past. Buildings they remember in their original use are now threatened by new demand for housing in the area. For gentrifying newcomers, the neighbourhood is perhaps primarily a means of arranging their lifestyle; it offers sites for their consumption with an appeal based on its vibrant, edgy, inner-city identity.

## The view from Bermondsey Street

"It's a very strange neighbourhood: you can have a rich couple with no children living in a 3 million pound warehouse conversion, living in close proximity to a couple on the dole in their thirties with two to three kids, living in a council estate next door..."

The decision to take the view from the 'eye of the street' stemmed from the realisation that our initial impressions of the area, a conception of space guided by the view of the planner and the story of the statistics, did not offer us a full picture of the complexities of West Bermondsey. To understand the 'inhabitant' strictly in terms of housing would offer only an incomplete picture of the workings of the area, its competing identities and senses of belonging in negotiating the production of space.

An alternative approach was to combine extended field observations with 'spot' interviews of shop-owners and workers on Bermondsey Street – exploring their conceptions of the area, its life and its inhabitants. This was supplemented by insights from meetings of the local history group and the West Bermondsey Forum. Historically, this part of London saw the intertwining of living and working in close proximity to one another –and it is only relatively recently and gradually that these two have become dissociated from each other. Yet, working in an area is one way of 'inhabiting' it; and those who worked in the area often identified with West Bermondsey more than where they lived.

"Bermondsey Street is happening - but it's just around the street. There's nothing around, just estates..."

On an initial walk around Bermondsey, guided by Southwark Council's former head of planning, we followed a path that ran across disparate parts of Bermondsey. The result was a distinct impression of discontinuity in the urban fabric, and a sense of the rapid change brought about by gentrification as one that could only produce further discontinuities in the urban fabric. Hence, brushing past West Bermondsey, on the edge of Tanner Street, the view from the street dwelt in particular on one social housing block surrounded, even besieged by, recent new-build developments.

I followed up this initial exercise with an extended field observation over a twenty- four hour period, further observations and spot interviews. The more observation was carried out, the more clear it became that there was a certain buzz and quality about Bermondsey Street that had been missed during our initial walk, and there appeared to be a sense of boundedness to the area that could not be at first appreciated. Far from a discontinuous area of urban fabric, made worse by gentrification, increasingly what greeted us seemed more like an urban village, with a variety of people and uses.







A common negative understanding of gentrification presents itself conveniently to explain the apparent discontinuities in the urban fabric and the decline of the 'local community'. But this prevalent view of gentrification as a progressive disease endured by an area ignores the wider 'epidemiological' context: in this case the evolution of London's labour market, redefining its geographies of economic activity. In this light, the arrival of newcomers to the area cannot alone be blamed for the threat to the cohesion of a community whose livelihoods, which had centred on work in local factories, had already been compromised by their closure. The arrival of newcomers can be seen as a step towards injecting new life to the area – independent of a reliance on industrial employment as a basis for maintaining a sense of cohesion and community.

It was particularly striking in interviews that a number of respondents suggested that when the 'gentrifiers' first arrived the area was in a general state of dereliction. One of them noted how she simply passed through Bermondsey Street as a shortcut, without even knowing its name, and remembered the lack of any particular salient features that distinguished it from the rest of the area, or suggested a sense of place. This contrasts strikingly with the situation we see today, where Bermondsey Street is a central artery of what has come to be defined as West Bermondsey – central in its identity as a bounded area, as an 'urban village' which has emerged from something that wasn't that before, and has probably created a greater diversity of activities on Bermondsey Street than it ever enjoyed in the past. The local history group's historical reclamation played a key role in the delineation of the conservation area around Bermondsey Street – although they don't tend to see their protagonism as successful enough in countering what they view as the negative encroachment of new development. In fact, their role in uncovering the area's past could be seen to provide the very foundational myth behind the emergence of West Bermondsey as a new urban village, reconfiguring its sense of place in a way that is attractive to newcomers, and 'primes' their engagement with the area, culminating in the sprouting of small design industries and the location of the Fashion Museum on Bermondsey Street itself.

What seems apparent from this is that both newcomers and the original residents are involved in a process of shaping place and, particularly in giving Bermondsey Street symbolic centrality in the area, in jointly creating a sense of place that translates into the 'urban village' of West Bermondsey we experience today. Nevertheless, this view of the emerging 'urban village' is over-optimistic; clearly all is not so rosy.

While the stimulus of change has fuelled a new economic vitality in the area, the prospects for integrating the established population into the labour market structure of the area is perhaps limited; along with the rising prices that increasingly distance those in social housing from actively benefiting from the change. The Leathermarket Joint Management Board has established a charity to try and re-skill people, but the jobs available, as gardeners on the estate and in maintenance, are limited and arguably limiting. West Bermondsey supports at least two distinct 'cultural models'.

"All the people I've had to ban from the pub because of unruly behaviour are from the estates."

"It's a complicated society; there's a feeling that the multicultural thing has worked, but it hasn't..."

"I've lived here for twenty years, but now I have a son, I may consider moving away. I don't think it's the kind of area people want to spend their entire lives in... The people moving in are active people. Once you start a family, your priorities change."

The fate of Symington House, a 1960s tower block which is in an extreme state of disrepair, is soon to be decided by the residents: will it be demolition or refurbishment? However, the residents want answers as to why they are being faced with such a decision, and the Tenant Management Organisation, Leathermarket Joint Management Board, claims that they are just as much in the dark, serving to stir suspicions of what Southwark Council is up to. Moreover, the residents attribute the bleak physical state of the block to the JMB, while the JMB point out their inability to control the budget for major works, thereby revealing their powerless position in the face of the council. This specific moment, in the case of Symington House, therefore brings to the fore the complex power relations between Southwark Council and its broader regeneration programme, the tenant management organisation and its subsidiary tenants' and residents' associations, and the residents themselves.

Tenant Management Organisations (TMO) are 'legally constituted organisations' (Tunstall 2001: 2499), where the local authority retains ownership of the property and enters into a Modular Management Agreement with the TMO. There are 250 TMOs in Britain today, managing approximately 85,000 properties (Miliband 2006). Since 1975, local authorities have had the right to delegate budget and management responsibilities to tenant management organisations. The majority of TMOs were established in the 1990s and most specifically after the Right to Manage was introduced in 1994, requiring that Local Authorities granted requests for tenants to self manage providing they met the stipulated levels of competence.

Leathermarket Joint Management Board (JMB) is a Tenant Management Cooperative founded in 1996 in West Bermondsey that manages five estates consisting of 1500 properties. All residents, including leaseholders, are members of the JMB. Each of the five estates have their own Tenants and Residents Association (T&RA) and two members of each T&RA are elected as directors to sit on the managing board of the JMB. The board of elected directors is also joined by co-opted members, which can include councillors, and they collectively determine the direction of decisions to be undertaken by staff. The JMB has its own office on Leathermarket Street and, whilst most of the staff are employed by the JMB, in line with the TMC model, a few members of the staff are still seconded from the council, as is more common in Estate Management Boards.



1 Symington House, Lawson Estate





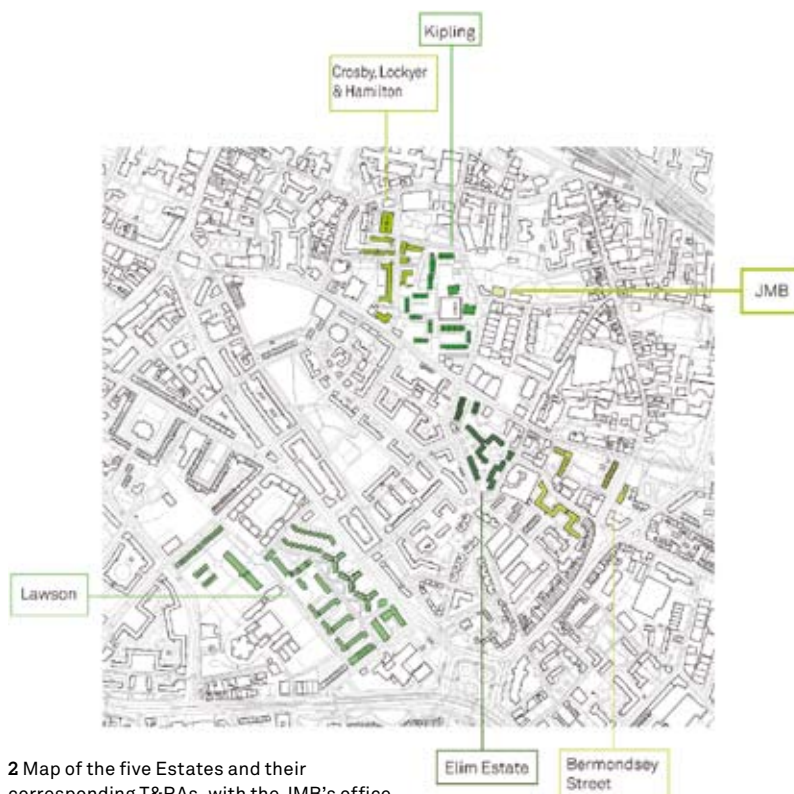
At a meeting with residents of Symington House the JMB were accused of being responsible for the neglect of the building. However, members of Lawson T&RA and the JMB retorted that they have been at the mercy of the council's decision to allocate money. Indeed, the major works undertaken by the JMB are funded and run by Southwark Council (Leathermarket JMB 2005). Sue from Lawson T&RA exclaimed at the meeting:

"We are not councillors, we don't belong to the council. You're all treating us like we have got the answers, like we are responsible, like it is all our fault. Southwark Council wouldn't give the JMB money to do up the block. The JMB paid £7,500 to do a survey on this block alone five years ago, that survey went back to Southwark Council and the housing manager at the time denied that the survey said this was in a state of disrepair. For six years we were trying to get them to acknowledge that the survey was done by an independent surveyor. Everybody says the JMB, the JMB, it is not the JMB's fault if they didn't get money to repair it. It is Southwark council. The council still own this land. The council will make a decision based on your vote, your vote"

The chair of the JMB positions the organisation sharply against the council: "Now our job, as a JMB, is to protect the interests of our residents, not the council. We are not part of a Stalinist plan". But, a member of staff at the JMB elucidates the more complex relationship between the JMB, the council and the residents:

"Our role is to tell tenants what is going on and support residents in whatever they decide. We are kind of damned if we do and damned if we don't: if we do anything more we are accused of stirring and meddling, and we get councillors on our back and if we do anything less, we get residents saying hang on a minute..."

It is often assumed that empowerment among TMOs is greater when the organisation is smaller and when there is more control over the budget (Uguris 2004, Price Waterhouse 1995). The JMB is unusual in its size – with 1500 properties it is at the top end of the TMCs which range from 12 – 1448 properties (Cairncross et al 2002: 23) – and an officer from Southwark Tenant Management Support (TMS) considers the size to impede both accountability and empowerment:



2 Map of the five Estates and their corresponding T&RAs, with the JMB's office

3 "Why haven't the windows been done? We are supposed to be Lawson. All the windows get done and ours don't"

4 "We are second class, Heygate residents are first class!"

5 "I am a quite different person compared to most people on the board: I am young and a professional working person....I mean part of the reason when the previous chair left that I got asked to be chair is that there are a number of these big challenges facing us as an organisation and people liked the way I behaved and had been strategic in my early time as a director and they asked can I carry on in that way." JMB member

6 "I have achieved a lot. I have learned a lot about people, I have learned how to handle people a lot better socially and the way I respond to them, um, I have learned how to public speak... I think the TRA helps you, you know, it certainly helped me in my job, cos I am a lot more confident in dealing with sort of heads of department because I deal with heads of council, when you are TRA-ing." Sue from Lawson T&RA

7 "It is helpful experience for me sitting on a board and being involved in making decisions. Maybe one day I will be on a big board. That is what is in it for me. The other working man on the board is a council candidate; he wants to be a councillor. It is a bit like who becomes a school governor".



“...in terms of their day to day involvement and control, I don’t think necessarily the people who live within Leathermarket feel empowered, the way they would in smaller TMOs..., it still seems like a council office sort of thing. But particularly with the small TMOs located within the estate, either in a flat or something else, there is much more open access. The relationship with the general operational staff is generally much closer, and that sort of thing. And I think you are far more conscious of that feeling of empowerment in the smaller TMOs than in the larger”.

This reflects a broader assumption made within activism that local means ‘good’ (Purcell 2006: 1924) and that localities are homogenous bounded entities. In reality, they can be fraught with complex power relations (see caption 8). Furthermore, the high numbers of women involved in the T&RAs and TMO is often put down to the ‘local’ nature of the organisations, an explanation offered by the female members themselves and by a male interviewee who saw their participation as due to women’s ‘loyalty to their locality and the “home”’.

8 “Well, I am not being funny, but Fanella who was with me, she is the only one coloured person who has really come down and joined in and done anything, cos coloured tend to keep themselves away from you...but if there is anything going, they are always at the front, but they don’t put anything out, they don’t like to put anything in. you know what I mean?” Edna from Lawson T&RA

9 “Basically women relate more to the home, the environment and so on and so forth than men do. This is actually true, this is not a prejudice, they actually do care more to be quite honest. Particularly if they bring up kids. Most men are careless of most things. That is my experience. This is even true among the elderly. Women have always been more active within the tenants movement more generally. The funny thing is, when it actually comes to representing the tenants movements at an area, district or borough wide level, all suddenly it becomes predominantly men”. Why? “I think because women are involved, because of their loyalty towards the locality, and they are not actually that interested in these strategic things. Their loyalty is to their locality. It is an old fashioned working class thing actually. Men like to be the chair and go to the meetings.” Officer, Tenant Management Support, Southwark

10 “We organised a day which was predominantly for the kids. And we all worked quite hard to get it all ready organise it and on the day, and I was disgusted because not one person came up to me and said thank you, not one. And you think to yourself, why am I knocking myself out for people who don’t care?” Vice-Chair of Lawson T&RA

This position is reflected, somewhat alarmingly, in policy discourse, where the report by Cairncross et al explains women’s involvement as due to the ‘local focus’ of the organisation (2002: 29). ‘Community’ and the ‘local’ are often gendered terms (Uguris 2004: 7), and while the government initiatives to devolve power to tenant organisations is supposed to ‘empower’ the individuals, it simultaneously reifies women’s position within these organisations.

One could also ask whether it is reasonable to propose that more responsibility, in terms of budget control, should be given to an organisation such as the JMB, which depends upon volunteers. This could be compounded by the difficulty in getting people involved, due to the large amounts of time that participation demands and its often unacknowledged and thankless nature (See caption 10), as is commonly found among TMOs (Power and Tunstall 1995, Tunstall 2001: 2511, Cairncross et al 2002: 62). Devolving to the locality assumes that organisations and individuals at this level can really have an impact on decisions made. However, as in the case of Symington House, the TMO is at the mercy of the council and, when questioned by residents, they have to admit to their limited role, serving to disempower the members. The residents themselves do not feel that being given the chance to vote on the fate of their home is a form of power; to the contrary, they consider it a form of trickery, thereby illustrating how considerably powerless they feel.

However, this is not to suggest that TMOs should not be granted more control over their budget and therefore be more able to respond to people’s needs. It is merely to add a cautionary note against the notion that devolution necessarily lends more power to the ‘community’ and ‘individual’. As David Miliband’s speech states: “many of the outcomes we seek – safer streets, better health and education – depend on the responsibilities of individuals as well as the quality of public services...So there is a vital need to empower citizens, including voluntary groups, so that they are able to help produce the services or goods they use” (Miliband 2006). So with devolution also comes increased responsibility for situations, such as unemployment or anti-social behaviour, whose causes may lie beyond the level of control of the individual user. Instead of using the rhetoric of devolution of power and ‘empowerment’, real support, such as improved training and advice, should be given to accompany increased control and responsibility, such as budgetary control for instance, rather than leaving the organisation and its voluntary members to ‘sink or swim’ (Tunstall 2001: 2505).

## The Individual Inhabitant / Andrew Rudd

To explain the nature of socially-constructed space and spatially-constructed society, Lefebvre's (1991) spatial trialectics posit three overlapping, mutually constitutive realms: the perceived, conceived and lived, which pertain to, respectively, urban routine, architects and planners, and the inhabitant. But '[i]n the spatial practice of neocapitalism... representations of space [conceived space] facilitate the manipulations of representational spaces [lived space]' (1991: 59). The way in which planners, architects and sociologists construe the inhabitant heavily obscures their identity. Gieryn suggests that the inhabitant themselves has a distinct place in creating space in a building's life. 'Human agency is most obvious during the design of a place, and that is the first moment. Agency shifts (analytically) to the building itself once completed and occupied... as it structures and stabilizes', ultimately 'agency returns to people when the building is narrated and reinterpreted' (Gieryn 2002: 44). It is thus essential to obtain the empirical evidence of individual inhabitants, the better to understand the lived space(s) of Bermondsey.

We began with a 24-hour immersion near Tanner Street in west Bermondsey, to both observe and inhabit. This began to problematise the issue of the inhabitant: could the social landscape be 'read'? Were inhabitants' actions legible 'signs' as such? Conversely, could individual, subjective experience be generalised? Living transiently in a nearby hotel room, we faced the mundane yet highly personal issues which both informed and were informed by our sociospatial surroundings. For us it was difficult to both live and look, and simpler to separate the two. And this was essentially the issue: the possible tensions and collaborations between the experts' conception of the inhabitant and the inhabitant's own lived reality. This particular study then became, in part, an assessment of Lefebvre's elusive, 'passive' lived space.

1 24 hours in Bermondsey



## Edith

Edith had lived in the Lawson Estate since its construction, having been moved from another estate by the local Council: “[w]ell they got us out, you see? I was married then. We had no bath-rooms. It was a few years ago, as you can guess. That had to be what, well – 50 years ago. They done us all out, and sort of remodernised them...we didn’t have to take what they offered us. They offered us a couple of places, and they didn’t entertain at all... I had no intention of living...somewhere on Drury Lane. I was used to – you know, this side of the water. [...] So this flat was empty. And this was me third choice. So I took it.”

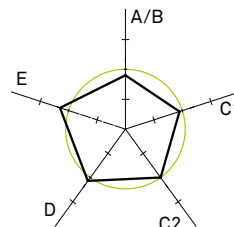
The only change she and her late husband had made was to install faux-wood panelling acquired when he had worked at a lumberyard. This likely occurred only after they had purchased the place, though Edith thought her husband’s motivation was something else. “I suppose he thought it would save him to decorate.” We asked about problematic design aspects; she responded “[t]he stairs, of course. But I just wish we had a balcony. Why we never had one I’ll never know. Maybe they just ran out of money.” “What would you do on a balcony?” “Well, I’d sit out there in good weather.”



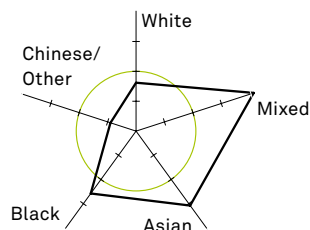
2 Edith at home in Nashe House, Lawson Estate, Burbage Close.

3 Quantitative social data based on 2001 Census for the 00BEGF0018 output area. Weighted in comparison to Borough of Southwark average shown in green. (See equivalent green box on facing page for social data key)

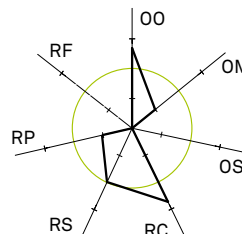
Class



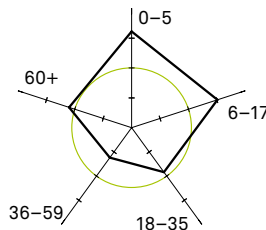
Race



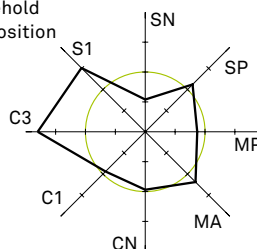
Tenure



Age



Household Composition





## Patty

Lefebvre's notions of conceived vs lived space were clearly on display at a meeting of the Lawson Estate's Tenants' Association, where long-time resident Patty challenged the architects' wisdom about how a new school planned for across the street from her building would be used, and its real impact on the neighbouring Estate.

"It's just that the traffic itself – I've lived there for so many years now – I know – I can predict what will happen. That it will start off well, and then it will go to pot; then they may decide that that entrance is going to be used for something else, and then we'll then have all the school kids coming through there yet again. And if there is an entrance there, they will try to get in there. And it brings them on to the estate, which is the very thing that we are trying to avoid."



4 Patty at home in the Lawson Estate, Deverell Street.

5 Quantitative social data based on 2001 Census for the 00BEGF0026 output area. Weighted in comparison to Borough of Southwark average shown in green.

### Class (Approximate Social Grade)

A/B: Managerial  
C1: Professional  
C2: Manual  
D: Unskilled  
E: Unemployed/Assisted

### Race (Ethnic Group by resident)

#### Tenure (by household)

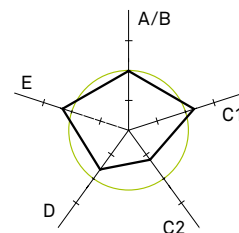
OO: Owned outright  
OM: Owned mortgage  
OS: Shared ownership  
RC: Social rented from local council  
RS: Other social rented  
RP: Private rented  
RF: Rent free

#### Age (by population)

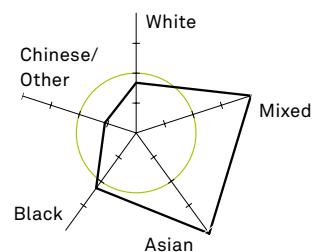
#### Household Composition

SN: Single non-pensioner  
SP: Single pensioner  
MP: Mixed pensioner and non-pensioner  
MA: Multi-occupant adult  
CN: Two adults, no children  
C1: Two adults, 1–2 children  
C3: Two adults, 3+ children  
S1: Single with children

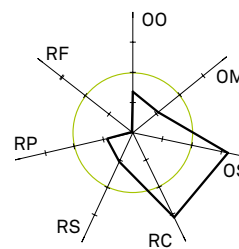
Class



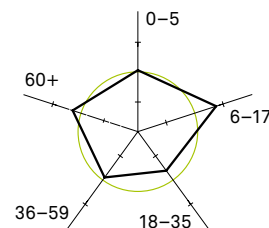
Race



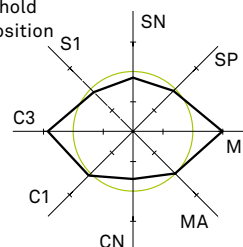
Tenure



Age



Household Composition



5

[Architect:] "Sorry; which entrance are you referring to?" [Project Manager:] "Deverell Street." [Architect:] "There isn't any entrance on Deverell Street." [Project Manager:] "Vehicle entrance." [Architect:] "Yes, but..." [Project Manager:] "That vehicle entrance only goes into a compound that is serving kitchens; there's no exit –" [Architect:] "There's no exit through to the school, it's an enclosed – there's like a door into a room..." [Project Manager:] "It doesn't stop them; they've knocked the walls down, the fences down. You know, they're little...thugs, some of them."

Asked why they were so insistent on keeping the kitchen in that location, Patty later (and privately) responded: "I don't know. There is some airy-fairy plan that the kitchens and central to the dining room and that brings the students together." At the last meeting he said "Well, we can't because there isn't a route through to the kitchens there", and I said, "Move the damn kitchens! Put it at the end of the block. I think it's an architectural concept shall we say, to make it all happy and bring the children together. Oh please, you have to tie them down first."

Patty lived alone and had no children, in a neighbourhood with a slightly higher than average instance of cohabitating adults and couples with multiple children, a majority of whom rent from the local Council.

## Jenny and Pauline

Like Edith, though Jenny was a social tenant and her options were somewhat predetermined, her decisions were far from foregone: "I lived at Waterloo – I had a flat at Waterloo. And my mum was an invalid, and she was in a wheelchair in the end. And I asked for a transfer. Well, they offered us a place at Abbey Woods, and that – we couldn't afford it. And that seemed stupid. Because I had three children, my mum, Johnny and me. And we couldn't afford the – fares to come to work. So we turned down the offer at Abbey Woods, and they offered us here. And we just sort of moved in; we come round to view it. And... I said 'oh, it's a lovely place'".

The ways in which Jenny had appropriated her flat showed that inhabitants do not always desire what they do not have, nor that those from the working class do not appreciate the aesthetic aspects of their homes, even the less common ones: "A woman designed these...because I go up to bed, and these three go down to bed. So we've all got our living rooms and kitchens together; we're not on top of each other for noise [...] I know it's an awkward-shaped room, but it's a comfortable room. I know I've only got a little balcony, but it's – it's really nice." Pauline had moved in a similar context, and though she lived in the same building as Jenny, her reaction to the layout was entirely opposite: "[h]ers goes up, mine goes down; so my bedrooms and bathroom are downstairs. My toilet is next to my kitchen and living room, which is a lovely place to have it [...] cause it's got no washing facilities...so you've either got to come and use the kitchen sink to wash your hands, or you've got to go downstairs; and downstairs is kind of private because it's your bedroom [...] And they're really awkwardly-shaped; not one room is square... when you come to lay your carpets, I mean when we had ours costed for carpets, it was going to cost a bomb. [...] What else do I like about the flat? I like the low ceilings. They can be an advantage; they're not hard to clean."

The women lived in an area with a high concentration of the unemployed and on state assistance, and with a relatively low proportion of British whites. A vast majority either rented from the Council or had taken advantage of 'Right to Buy'. Households were more often than not either pensioners or those with multiple children, either in one- or two-parent families.





6

6 Jenny in her home, Jonson House, Lawson Estate, Great Dover Street.



7

7 Pauline with her daughter in the community building at Lawson Estate, Great Dover Street.

8 Quantitative social data based on 2001 Census for the 00BEGF0007 output area. Weighted in comparison to Borough of Southwark average shown in green.

Tenure (by household)

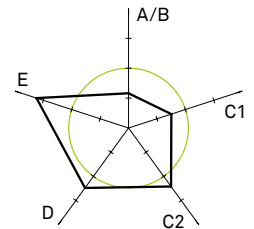
OO: Owned outright  
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Age (by population)

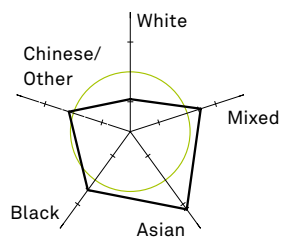
Household Composition

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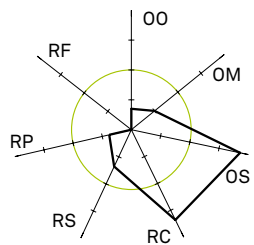
Class



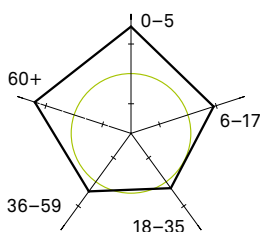
Race



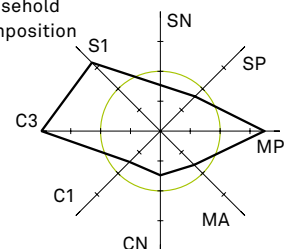
Tenure



Age



Household Composition



8

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### How do inhabitants negotiate change?

#### Jamie Keddie

1 The quantitative analysis is of ward-level data of Census returns. Three wards (Chaucer, Grange and Riverside). covering the sites of the group's research have been combined to produce a 'West Bermondsey' composite. Prior to 2001 the Grange ward was sub-divided of Abbey and Bricklayer wards

2 A new classification for socio-economic group was introduced for the 2001 Census. Comparison with the 1981 and 1991 returns social class classifications has been conducted in line with National Statistics guidance (2004)

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