

CREATIVITY AND CONFLICT: CULTURAL TOURISM IN LONDON'S CITY FRINGE

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Abstract:

This paper will examine the core/ periphery relationship between the City of London and the neighbouring inner areas of the metropolis, with reference to a case study of the Cultural Quarters Programme of the 'City Fringe Partnership' - an initiative launched in 1995/6 by the area's four local authorities 'to alleviate the economic deprivation and physical dilapidation evident in the areas immediately surrounding the City'. A key feature of the Partnership's regeneration strategy will be interpretation of the area's history as well as its 'alternative' arts and crafts, clubs and restaurants, street festivals and other events which draw on the cultural diversity and creativity of the area's communities. The study questions the minimal function of cultural tourism as 'soft infrastructure' to facilitate urban regeneration, and explores the scope for more imaginative interpretation for the benefit of visitors through active involvement of artists and local residents in the process of conservation, animation and promotion of the built environment for leisure and tourism.

'It came as something of a shock, though to witness this, the beginning perhaps of the transfiguration of shabby and wonderful Brick Lane. For most of us Brick Lane is the least likely of smart designer haunts. It is a rambling alley - of the kind guidebooks call "Dickensian" - lined with unforgettably spiced Bangladeshi restaurants, with Indian sweet shops and sari emporia... What worries me most is that whenever the design scene moves in on an old London street... Old businesses, shops where you can buy things for a song, restaurants where you can eat for a fiver vanish. Within a matter of months every second building is a bar or cafe with raw concrete walls, difficult chairs, effete middle class youth trying hard to look hard and hard up, and menus offering holiday food at imaginative prices. Flats become "lofts". The poor are pushed out and the city as a whole loses out, loses the very mix of cultures and way of life that made its old and shabbier parts so very appealing in the first place' (J. Glancey: 'Changing places' in *The Guardian*, Space supplement 09/10/98: p16)

Introduction:

K. Worpole and L. Greenhalgh (1996) have argued that the best of public spaces have rhythms and patterns of use of their own, being occupied at different times by quite different groups, occasionally by almost everybody. Their attractiveness, flexibility, and pluralist sense of ownership makes them very valuable features of urban life. Over the last 10-15 years in the UK, urban authorities have 'rediscovered' civic pride in the desire to create good quality

public space in city centres. Cultural policy and urban policy have met in the design of new city squares and the concern to create a vibrant city culture. Much of this has been driven by the economic imperative to attract inward investment and service employment to compensate for the decline of the manufacturing sector in post-industrial cities, further heightened by competition with new car-oriented out-of-town centres. As in other cities in Europe and North America, arts and heritage - featured in the public domain - have been given a high profile in the promotion of the 'liveable city', and have played a key role in the process of urban renaissance. Urban public spaces and streetscape are promoted as art object. City skylines, historic quarters and architecture are now appreciated by policy makers as key aspects of cultural investment in strategies for growth as cities 'struggle to attract inwards investment by amassing the correct mix of cultural or "soft" infrastructure (D. Crilley 1993: p 233). Nevertheless, as B. Goodey (1994: p 177) has emphasised, there is 'an inherent tension between the promoter's and the community's requirements of place.'

Conflicts between different interest groups may be even more pronounced in areas of mixed land use around the edge of city centres. Such neighbourhoods may experience strong pressures for development - demolition and reconstruction or refurbishment of older buildings - to accommodate new activities, business and residents. Gentrification - the process whereby working class inner city areas become regenerated by the influx of middle class homeowners - seems first to have been highlighted in academic literature by the British sociologist R. Glass (1963) with reference to neighbourhoods close to the centre of London (T. Butler 1996). J. Burgess (1985) discusses the very idea of the 'inner city' as a social construct, and explores the way in which the media - especially daily newspapers - have developed a vocabulary to describe the phenomenon of gentrification. The word 'colonisation', for example, was frequently used in the early 1980s, suggesting reclamation of useful parts of the inner city back into 'civilized' society by 'urban pioneers'. With reference to her case study of 'loft living' in SoHo, New York, S. Zukin (1982) analyses the transformation of neighbourhoods defined as 'urban villages'. Enclaves of art and craft production emerge in areas of low-rent accommodation, notably redundant industrial buildings and warehouses, which provide studio and living space for people with creative talent but little money. Later, such places acquire prestige with young professionals - a fashionable address which confers status through association with creativity. Rising land values displace both working class resident and artists. Furthermore, established communities and businesses may feel that they are losing 'ownership' of the public places and facilities in their immediate neighbourhood.

P. Bourdieu (1984: pp 354-371) discusses the role of a rising new *petite bourgeoisie* as cultural intermediaries. Typically, they are employed in professions such as marketing, public relations, fashion, medical and social services, as well as some established occupations such as art and craft production and nursing. The influential social group has a high level of cultural capital, a fascination with experimentation, personal development and new experiences. They are attracted to forms of artistic expression which defy establishment taste - for example in music, cinema and strip cartoons. Inner city locations seem particularly suitable for this group, especially since many work long and unsociable hours in central business districts and travel between urban centres, a short distance to commute is desirable. Furthermore, older urban, industrial or waterfront areas may have a particular appeal in terms of atmosphere, as well as the opportunity to experiment and to enjoy a diversity of experiences which satisfy their taste for symbolic defiance embracing 'all forms of culture which are, provisionally at least, on the (lower) boundaries of legitimate culture' (P. Bourdieu op cit: p 360). M. Featherstone (1991: pp 95-111) discusses the aestheticization of the urban fabric, and its role in drawing back the

middle class into enclaves of the inner city. Sites formerly defined as low life places may have a special *frisson*, although the process of gentrification and commodification means that, in time, they become redefined as respectable places - worthy objects of the tourist gaze.

F. Bianchini and H. Schwengel (1991: pp 214-5) highlight two significant trends in the property-led regeneration schemes characteristic of the real estate boom in UK and the restructuring of urban economies during the 1980s. Firstly, there was an emphasis on the design of individual buildings rather than planning the whole - a postmodern attitude to space which was no longer to be regarded as a totality to be shaped according to the needs of the wider social project aimed at a mass audience. This can also be understood, in part, as disillusionment with modernism expressed in the planning experience of the previous two decades. The second trend was the emerging art of 'place marketing' as urban centres and regions repositioned themselves in national and international markets to appeal to specialized audiences - including public and private sector investors, developers, tourists, convention organizers and speciality shoppers. Spectacular new shopping malls, conference and exhibition centres, museums, art galleries and concert halls have been used as 'flagships' in place marketing strategies to gain a competitive advantage in this global market place (cf. H. Smyth 1994). The creation and marketing of urban villages as 'cultural quarters' also featured in strategies where there a lively arts scene. Thus, places known for their wealth of cultural production may become enclaves of leisure *consumption*.

During the 1980s, in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, there was a marked shift away from unquestioning faith in regulation of development through land use planning to facilitate regeneration of urban economies. In the context of recession in the late 1970s/ early 1980s, planning systems which had been designed to constrain and control the developer's space seemed ill-suited to the stimulation of inward investment in areas of economic and social disadvantage (G. Ashworth and H. Voogt 1994). In the UK, as in other European countries, the fundamental principles of the postwar planning system remain in place - an important contrast with North America, where vigorous competition between urban centres and 'civic boosterism' has a long tradition. Nevertheless, there has been some loosening of land use regulation. Furthermore, there is now an explicit and widespread use of marketing techniques by urban planning and regeneration agencies on both sides of the Atlantic. P. Kotler et al (1993: pp 99-100) identify four key components in the marketing of a place:

- a) sound design that enhances its attractiveness and more fully develops its aesthetic qualities and values (Place as *character*);
- b) basic infrastructure that moves people and goods in ways compatible with the natural environment (Place as a fixed *environment*);
- c) basic services of quality that meets business and public needs (Place as *service provider*);
- d) a range of attractions for their local people and visitors (Place as *entertainment and recreation*);

The authors stress the point that strategies for place improvement cannot be viewed in narrow terms as a promotion and image building exercise. Nevertheless, the brand image may seem to develop a free-floating existence of its own. According to an article in *Design Week* 'with the growth of commercialism, it was only a matter of time before cities came to be treated as

commodities. A good marketing strategy has worked wonders with a whole range of goods and services, so why not with a city?' A spokesperson for the agency which designed Birmingham's (1992) logo and strapline - "the meeting place of Europe"- commented 'We looked at Birmingham like we would any other brand, to find out what differentiated it from its competitors'. Looking back on the campaign, he felt that while the logo was effective in itself, the brand had 'not been managed particularly successfully since' (T. Bawden 1997: p 17).

As M. Barke and K. Harrop (1994: pp 94-5) argue, every place has an *identity* which may differ from its *image*. The identity may be regarded as an objective thing - 'what a place is really like'. They draw on Fredorcio et al's (1991: p 24) definition of corporate or personal identity as the projection of who you are and what you stand for, what you do and how you do it'. In contrast, the image of a place is how it is perceived externally. Thus, an image may exist quite independently from the facts of objective reality. P. Kotler et al (1993: p 141) define a place's image as 'the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people can have of a place. Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with the place'. The history of an area and the creativity of its artists, designers and craftspeople can make a vital contribution to the spatial identity. Place marketers have an important role to play in marketing and interpreting marginal places as destinations for cultural tourism, making them more *accessible* in the widest sense of the word. The following case study raises some important issues concerning the tensions between the development of cultural tourism and spatial identity in the context of disadvantaged neighbourhoods on the periphery of a central business district in a large city.

City Fringe: Attractions and Horrors of a Marginal Place

The identity of London's 'City Fringe' has been shaped through its symbiotic - if unequal - relationship with the City. In R. Shields' (1991) phrase, it has remained a 'place on the margin', not only in terms of its peripheral location, but its social status. The 'liberties' north and east of the precincts of the city developed as a refuge for excluded social groups, activities and institutions. From medieval times, small settlements which grew just outside the city wall accommodated migrants from other parts of the British Isles and successive waves of foreigners, some fleeing political or religious persecution in other countries, but all offering particular skills and labour and resources needed by the host community. Many of the activities they performed were restricted or prohibited within the city itself, such as brewing, dyeing textiles, tanning, and particular types of metalworking. In the fourteenth century, English monarchs encouraged cloth makers from Flanders to establish their trade. From the sixteenth century, Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal were needed as lenders of money and merchants. Protestant Huguenots from France brought their special skills as silk weavers, fine instrument makers and entrepreneurs, arriving in large numbers after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, large numbers of poor Jews from Eastern Europe came to the Fringe and East End of London, many finding work in the clothing or 'rag' trade.

The public places of the Fringe were used for some of London's biggest fairs, festivals and markets - diversions which attracted many wealthy visitors. In the reign of Elizabeth I plays were banned within the city walls, and 'The Theatre' - England's first purpose built playhouse - was built at Shoreditch in 1576. Here and at the 'The Curtain' nearby, many of

Shakespeare's dramas were performed. Later attractions included pleasure gardens, circuses and music halls. The Fringe thus continued to offer a diversity of entertainment, but from the early eighteenth century the villages expanded and much of the area became built up and densely populated, providing squalid and overcrowded conditions for some of London's poorest residents, including the immigrant communities. The public places also provided platforms for protest and dissent - religious nonconformism, trade unions, reformists and revolutionaries. The spectacle of wealth and grim poverty juxtaposed was described by novelists including Defoe and Dickens and portrayed in the engravings of artists including Hogarth and Dore. The real-life horrors of the Jack the Ripper murders around Spitalfields and Whitechapel in the 1880s further reinforced the sinister side of the place-myth. The area therefore became 'known' to many who had never visited it, evoking feelings of revulsion and fear as well as fascination.

By the early part of the twentieth century a range of manufacturing industries, including many small firms, were located in the Fringe. Entrepreneurs made full use of the availability of cheap labour and specialised skills, as well as the proximity of large industrial and consumer markets and access to transport by rail and sea. Factories and workshops, many with a very poor working environment, developed cheek by jowl with densely packed housing, shops, street markets such as Petticoat Lane, places of worship, entertainment and other facilities. Particular areas were associated with particular trades and activities, such as furniture, leather goods and clothing manufacture in Shoreditch. Some small pockets of these industries remain to this day, but the postwar era saw a decline in manufacturing as in other inner city areas. The Jewish population moved away from the area, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, but new immigrant groups took their place, adapting the old building stock - including places of worship - for their own use, and acquiring small businesses. Spitalfields now has the largest Bangladeshi population in the UK, as well as a growing Somali community. With a declining manufacturing base, however, ethno-racial minority groups and other residents have experienced low income and high levels of unemployment. Their disadvantage has been further compounded by poor housing stock, run down infrastructure and poor facilities. And, as with previous minority groups who lived in the area, they have unfortunately suffered harassment and periodic intimidation and violence from race-hate organisations.

In recent years, however, there has been some dramatic social and economic change in some areas within the Fringe, especially near the boundary with the City. During the 1980s and into the 1990s spectacular growth of financial services and other key sectors - notably the media, leisure and tourism - spread beyond the City and West End. Much of this expansion resulted in relocation to the 'new city' of London Docklands, but there was also some redevelopment and refurbishment of attractive older property at the borders of the City's 'Square Mile' and the Fringe. Physical incursion into local communities and loss of familiar landmarks created tension - a notable example being the formation of a protest group opposing the proposed sale of the site of Spitalfields Market by the Corporation of London to a consortium of developers (R. Woodward 1993). There were also some pockets of commercial and residential gentrification, especially around Smithfield Market and Clerkenwell. Small enclaves of prosperity were emerging through expansion of professional services with a clustering of advertising, graphic design, printing and publishing firms, public relations, computer and media agencies. These, in turn began to support a lively collection of bars, cafes and restaurants where the new service providers could entertain colleagues and clients - a nascent visitor economy.

In the context of policies to encourage refurbishment and conservation, a mix of land use activities was encouraged by local planning policy. This included the conversion of former industrial buildings and Victorian warehouses into apartments. In the early 1990s, a company called 'Manhattan Lofts' began to create and sell highly fashionable 'loft shells' conveniently close to the City and West End of London. On the one hand, such investment was generating new wealth and facilitating environmental improvements in particular areas of the Fringe. And, the influx of wealthy and articulate newcomers tends to encourage better care of public places and facilities. Nevertheless, there was concern that rising land values and rents would displace established residents and businesses. Furthermore, it was apparent that wealth generation and the jobs created by the new firms servicing the City had brought little benefit to local communities, even where businesses servicing the 'Square Mile' had located within the Fringe. Between 1984 and 1991 the number of jobs in the Fringe had risen by 6%, compared with a fall of 6% in London as a whole. Nevertheless, a very high level of unemployment persisted among the resident workforce of the Fringe - an estimated 30,000 people. In the mid 1990s, some 22% residents of the Fringe area were registered unemployed, of whom two thirds had been out of work for more than six months. Local people had not been able to participate in the economic growth - fewer than 4% of jobs in the Fringe, and only 1% of City based jobs were held by Fringe residents (City Fringe Partnership 1996: p 5).

City Fringe Partnership: Cultural Quarters Project 1996-

By the mid 1990s, it was recognised that a strategic approach was needed, across administrative boundaries and between functions in tackling the problems and issues of the Fringe - 'joined up government'. The City Fringe Partnership (CFP) was established in 1995 under the leadership of the Corporation of London, with the London Boroughs of Islington, Hackney and Tower Hamlets, other public agencies - including those concerned with training - and representatives of the private sector. The Partnership rightly stressed that the problems of the Fringe were not endemic to the area, and should not be treated in isolation from future development of the capital, and indeed London's relationship with the global economy. The collaborative approach was designed to harness 'creativity, shared expertise, information and resources' (City Fringe Partnership 1996: p 2). The following year CFP secured £3 million through central government's Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) for the period 1996-9 for four demonstration projects to:

- a) help local people get jobs in the City;
- b) develop the area's cultural character and encourage visitors;
- c) help businesses with new technology;
- d) improve the buildings and streets at prominent gateways to the City;

The CFP's 'Developing Cultural Quarters' project would identify areas where the aim would be to create and sustain jobs by marketing local businesses and encouraging visitors, enhancing the accessibility and appearance of key areas, improving the competitiveness of businesses in the cultural industries and enhancing relevant skills.

The Partnership commissioned a study by consultants Discover Islington and Mazorca Ltd

(1997) to consider the potential for developing and marketing cultural tourism in the Fringe as a whole. Target markets for cultural tourism would include city businesspeople in their lunchtimes and evenings as well as domestic and international visitors who may seek a creative ambience and satisfying cultural experience away from the major tourist attractions of central London. Four major themes which might attract such visitors were identified: history and heritage; arts and design; shopping and market; eating and drinking. The study identified around a thousand attractions, facilities and organisations whose work 'contributes to the identity of the area'. These included over 400 concerned with art and design, 50 with history and heritage, around 150 specialist shopping, and over 300 eating and drinking places. Taking all categories, only half were 'visible' to the public gaze. Of those concerned with history and heritage, most were small scale museums, libraries and archives which attract local or specialist audiences. Few considered themselves in the 'mainstream tourism business' and access/ opening hours tended to be restricted. In Clerkenwell, for example, a cluster of small attractions included the Karl Marx Memorial Library, the Society of Genealogists, and the London Metropolitan Archives. In the Fringe as a whole, there were over 250 artists, designer-makers and craftspeople, who had the potential to attract visitors through opening their studios and by holding local exhibitions and craft fairs. In recent years, this approach has been demonstrated in an annual event known as the 'Hidden Art of Hackney' where art and craft products are exhibited and sold directly to the public.

The visitor's mental geography and image of the area may, however, be somewhat confused. America Newsweek's famous article (04/11/96) on the 'Capital of Cool' had emphasised London's leading role in fashion, design, eating and drinking. Subsequent articles had featured Hoxton and other places within the Fringe where innovative businesses in these sectors were strongly represented. For example, the *Time Out Eating and Drinking Guide* (1998: p 155) refers to it as '...a hotbed of creativity. Young Hoxton artist-types emerge from Victorian studios, and pass sunny lunchtimes...' While such publicity raises the profile it might, nevertheless, give a misleading impression as to the volume of visible and accessible activity which the visitor might encounter. Furthermore, the Fringe is seldom presented as a coherent entity in guidebooks used by visitors. Clerkenwell, in particular, is regarded as something of a geographical misfit, located in Islington to the west of the Fringe, but with characteristics similar to east London. The eastern side of the Fringe tends to get included in the 'East End', which often perpetuates stereotyped imagery, eg in *The Rough Guide to London* (R. Humphreys, 1997: 226):

'The name is synonymous with slums, sweatshops and crime, as epitomised by anti-heros such as Jack the Ripper and the Kray Twins, but also with the rags-to-riches careers of the likes of Harold Pinter and Vidal Sassoon, and whole generations of Jews who were born in the most notorious of London's cholera-ridden quarters and have now moved on to wealthier pastures'.

The CFP's consultants commentated that the real distances between central London and the Fringe were short - much of it being within thirty minutes walk of the City, and public transport was relatively good. Nevertheless, the *psychological distance* seemed to be much greater. The survey of attractions and facilities suggested that organisations in the area believe potential users perceive their location to be difficult to find and further from the City and public transport than they really were. Circulation *within* the Fringe was more problematic than access to it. Walking was generally the quickest and most convenient option, but the poor environment often created an unwelcoming atmosphere, and the area is severed by busy roads, with associated danger and delay in crossing, traffic noise and poor air quality. Signage

was often confusing and inconsistent, especially across local authority boundaries, and there was a general air of neglect with many vacant sites and derelict buildings, lack of maintenance, dirt and shabbiness - an atmosphere which was not conducive to a casual stroll. The CFP (1996) therefore emphasised the need for physical measures to reinforce the distinctiveness and improve the accessibility of key Fringe cultural locations, improving their appeal to visitors and the area's ambience as a business location. Visual impact and safety after dark would be achieved by measures such as enhanced street lighting, floodlights and night sculptures. Improved pedestrian facilities and signage would link visitor attractions and facilities to public transport terminals and routes, helping to break down barriers to access and movement.

In the areas designated as Cultural Quarters, there has therefore been a general emphasis on action to improve accessibility through physical improvements - especially through 'gateways' and along key thoroughfares. This includes 'interpretation' to make localities feel safer and more attractive and meaningful to visitors. Eighteen months from the start of the project, many proposals are still at a developmental stage, but a number of initiatives had been progressed. In the case of Clerkenwell Cultural Quarter in Islington, a walking tour devised by the local history society has been turned into a permanent feature just over three km long. In 1998, Culture Secretary Rt Hon Chris Smith MP opened the 'Clerkenwell Trail' marked out by plaques and banners designed by a local artist, whose work also features on an accompanying map guide. The tone of the trail is discreet and unobtrusive in keeping with the quiet atmosphere and medieval pattern of narrow winding streets and alleys in much of the area. Another initiative has been the temporary use of open spaces and buildings to display artworks. This has included a Victorian brewery for free exhibitions where visitors have an opportunity to meet the artists in an informal setting.

In the Spitalfields/ Brick Lane Cultural Quarter there has been a similar accent on access and animation, but here the approach has been less restrained. With additional funding from the Bethnal Green (1992-7) and then Eastside City Challenge urban regeneration programmes, the area is to be actively promoted as a high profile 'showpiece for London'. Again, first impressions are being enhanced by environmental improvements, especially around Underground stations and along Whitechapel Road which leads through to the City. Signage and streetscape is being upgraded, especially around Brick Lane and Petticoat Lane markets which are major attractions in their own right. Local businesses are also being encouraged to improve their shop signs with grant aid (City Fringe Partnership 1997: p6). There are also proposals to refurbish a number of visually important sites which are currently derelict or under-used. These include a Listed market building which could house a 'bazaar/ souk'. It is proposed that this will act as 'a key motor to the local economy, providing the missing "ethnic" shopping experience, extending the length of stay of visitors' stay and that income attracted'. There are also plans to expand and improve existing attractions and to create new ones. The 'London Cultural Heritage Centre' will provide the essential flagship for the Cultural Quarter. This facility will 'foster a sense of pride amongst the community and promote an image of London as an exciting and vibrant multicultural city. It will form the perfect complement to the traditional English history embodied by the Tower of London. It will further promote understanding, break down cultural barriers between races and religions...' (L.B. Tower Hamlets 1996: p 14).

Interpretation: Museum Without Walls

If successfully managed and marketed, cultural quarters such as the recently-designated Spitalfields/ Brick Lane area can be presented as something of a showpiece for the city of which it is a part, and in some cases for the region or nation. The history and current cultural activities are thus put into context with reference to the bigger picture of the more traditional heritage and arts scene. The prestige of a project can benefit the city as a whole and perhaps even become a national asset for example Le Marais *Secteur Sauvegarde* in Paris, Barcelona's Barri Gotic, Dublin's Temple Bar and Edinburgh's Old Town with its new flagship development of the National Museum of Scotland which opened in November 1998.

It is understandable if the street scene of the cultural quarter is gazed upon as a series of exhibits - something like a living folk museum - as for the visitor, there is the potential excitement of coming upon artists, musicians, actors and other 'characters' who add colour to the area and animate the scene. There may however be problems if the local population becomes part of the cultural fabric - the spectacle - of the area as is perhaps suggested by the core-periphery nature of the relationship of the Fringe to the City and the one-way traffic between the viewers from the City and the viewed of the Fringe. Therefore, the manner in which the history and culture of these areas is interpreted, packaged and marketed is vital to both the representation of local cultures and the visitor experience.

A useful way of analysing the interpretation of urban heritage within the context of the cultural quarter is to examine the process of "museumisation" discussed by E. Relph (1976:pp 93 -103) with reference to the landscapes of tourism where architecture is deliberately directed towards outsiders, spectators, passers-by and consumers. This process relates to the spreading of the museum idiom throughout urban cultural life and is also clearly linked to Andre Malraux's famous earlier essay on *The Museum Without Walls* (A. Malraux 1967). In this essay, Malraux concentrates on the prevalence of artistic reproductions (notably in photography) that serve to create museum spaces outside the classical ordering of the museum institution itself. Thus the museum, which in its early stages sought to represent the world through universality and spectacle, and in its later incarnation attempted to order the world into a discourse of progress evidenced by the material residue of history, now effectively has broken the bounds of the institution and has started to inhabit public space. K. Hetherington (1995) suggests in his work on Stonehenge as a "museum without walls" that the site of this important monument has become a heterotopia - a site used in many different ways by various social groups with both a legitimate usage and a variety of alternative readings. Thus, the site has become an open museum space, outside the constraints of the institution.

The spatial trajectory in Malraux's account is one of ever more openness, from the private ownership of works of art, to private collections, to semi-public collections, to collections open to the public, to the final spilling out of cultural works into a generalised public over which the gatekeepers of the museum have less and less control (K. Hetherington 1995: p 155).

This spilling out of culture into the public domain can be seen in the light of the post-modern aestheticisation of the urban experience (M. Featherstone 1991) or the heritagisation of our daily life (K. Walsh 1992). The dawn of the social history and community arts movements in the 1970s created a society of cultural consumers who are keen not only to appropriate the grand stories of monarchy, church and state but also to interact with the vernacular and the quotidien (J. Urry 1990, F. McLean 1997). Thus Malraux's trajectory of the ever increasing

openness of the museum idiom suggests increased access to the hidden arts and cultures of minority groups not normally represented through the classical museum experience.

It has been suggested that the antecedents of the social history approach to heritage presentation are the folk parks and living museums of the nineteenth century which started first in Skansen near Stockholm (K. Hudson 1987). Later attempts to create living heritage folk parks have been made in Indonesia, China, Ireland and Scotland (M. Hitchcock et al 1997). Commercially successful representations of past communities can be found at Wigan Pier, Beamish, County Durham, the Ironbridge Gorge in Telford, Jorvik in York and the Albert Docks in Liverpool. But these representations, although purporting to demonstrate the social history of areas, have been criticised for the way in which they present an unquestioning approach to history. They are privatised heritage spaces attempting to be real but as has been suggested, Beamish only looks real when it is being used as a film location (R. Hewison 1987) and the Albert Docks are silent on issues such as the relationship between the city and its history of slavery (J. Agyeman 1993, K. Walsh 1992).

Despite the fact that cultural quarters, on the other hand, represent living cultures in residential areas, criticism of the presentation of cultural quarters has some concurrence with that of museums and the heritage industry. L. Dodd (1991: p 29), for example, argues that museums have traditionally tended to dwell on a master narrative which necessarily excludes marginal and minority history - 'a seamless and unproblematical view of the world'. There is little opportunity to stop and ask questions, consider alternative narratives or discourses. Historic theme parks, which make impressive use new media to stimulate travel in space and time -for example Jorvik's "twelve minute electric trolley tour" (R. Hewison 1987: p 84) - allow even less time to question. The contemporary consumer is confronted with a total heritage experience with sights, sounds and even smells from the past recreated in the present.

It can also be argued that the very nature of heritage itself is disenfranchising and one-dimensional as J. Tunbridge and G. Ashworth suggest in their work on *Dissonant Heritage* (1996). The existence of heritage or inheritance also implies a disinheritance and this may be on a trivial scale or it may be damagingly widespread. If heritage has political and economic uses, then those cultures which do not contribute to the master narrative - the heritage message - "may be discounted, marginalised, distorted or ignored" (J. Tunbridge and G. Ashworth 1996: p 29). The Cultural Quarters project aims to address these issues by allowing the hidden histories and alternative cultures to come to the fore, for example the 'London Cultural Heritage Centre' and the Hidden Art of Hackney projects will tell a story very different to that retold on the guided tour buses of central London.

The heritage trail is a popular means of interpreting urban culture and is perhaps another way in which the museum idiom is imposed upon public space by the linking of places and sites of cultural interest and the interpretation of them by means of signage or literature. This phenomenon can be seen as another example of the master narrative of the museum, as visitors follow a predetermined route such as that literally marked onto the streets in the city of Boston. Bennett (1995) describes the organised tour through the classical museum in these terms: the role of the museum was that of "backteller" or detective, sorting out past clues to form an authoritative story of what happened - in this case the trajectory of progress.

the museum as "backteller" was characterised by its capacity to bring together, within the same space, a number of different times and to arrange them in the form of a path

whose direction might be traversed in the course of an afternoon. The museum visit thus functioned and was experienced as a form of organised walking through evolutionary time (T.Bennett 1995: p186).

It has been argued that the authority and the selectivity of the heritage narrative or trail precludes any real investigation or questioning of social or historical issues as visitors are set on a prescribed route designed to convey a particular story or place image (K. Walsh 1992) But away from the watchful eyes of the museum attendant and the ordering space of the museum building, the playful 'post-tourist' (M. Feifer 1985, J.Urry 1990) may perhaps 'sabotage' the heritage trail, dipping in and out of the heritage experience in order to stop and compare with contemporary culture and issues. The low-key approach to the Clerkenwell Trail for example, with discreet signage and a suggested route-map illustrated by a local artist encourages this more flexible approach. Marginal places are traversed in order to access the highlighted heritage attractions providing a valuable contemporary context within which to consider alternative histories. Other examples of heritage trails which take this more inclusive approach are described by D. Silbergh et al (1994: p134) who outline the *Looking at Houses Trail* in Aberdeen which includes run-down council housing in tandem with the city's more obviously attractive Georgian and Victorian villas. The authors also note that similar projects have been successful in places such as Harlem and Soweto.

As an urban regeneration project, the City Fringe Partnership aims to encourage visitor spend in local eating and drinking establishments, shops, markets, attractions and facilities. Heritage developments which effectively privatise public space do not allow the economic impacts of cultural tourism to benefit the local community and the heritage critique often emphasises this commodification as R. Hewison's *The Heritage Industry* (1987) amply demonstrates. Commentators have noted the link between commerce and culture in the post-modern city, in particular the links between theme parks, shopping malls and museums (F. Schouten 1995, M. Featherstone 1991). F. MacLean (1997: p 26) has suggested that the public are consuming museum experiences daily in various museums without walls, with "shops, factories, and pubs becoming more like museums; either becoming museums themselves, or being 'museumified.'" In this context of commodification, it is significant therefore that initiatives such as the Cultural Quarters Project have recognised the importance of local cultural industries and the active participation of local artists and cultural representatives in the regeneration of the City Fringe.

Conclusion: Creativity and Conflict

The strategy for regeneration would not just address the difficulties of the Fringe itself, but its 'contribution to the strength of London as a whole - Inner City Action with a World City Focus'. With regard to its prospects for developing cultural tourism, the Fringe needs to overcome the negative aspects of its guidebook image. Where it appears at all on the 'tourist map' it is generally fragmented, distorted and stereotyped. The special character or personality of the area owes much to its past and present communities of immigrants, whose contribution to the cultural life of London has been significant over many centuries. As C. Landry and F. Bianchini (1995: p 28) comment:

'Settled immigrants are outsiders and insiders at the same time. Because of their backgrounds they have different ways of looking at problems and different priorities, they can give a

creative impulse to a city’.

Nevertheless, the history of the area and the relics of its past that survive in the built environment are far from obvious to the casual visitor. Many of its attractions and facilities are housed in places to which the general public has limited or no access. Likewise, much of the creativity of the present generation of producers and service providers is hidden from view. If the recently designated cultural quarters are to attract their target markets and fulfil their aims, the Fringe must become more accessible. This requires a sensitive approach to interpretation and marketing, which has a strong input from the host communities - local residents, artists, craftspeople and other businesses. The approach must also develop the capacity to appeal to a wide range of interests among the visitors themselves. A number of key issues need to be addressed in London’s City Fringe and other cultural quarters where public spaces and facilities are to be used by “insiders” and “outsiders” and there is potential for conflict as well as creativity:

- X How to improve the poor image of the Fringe to would-be investors and visitors without destroying the area’s special identity?
- X How to present the cultural quarters to visitors and interpret their rich history without creating ‘museum enclaves’?
- X Is it possible to convey continuity in the urban landscape - to connect its different pasts with the vitality of its present insiders, and possibilities for the future?

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