Simone de Beauvoir tells the following story about a meeting between herself, Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Aron in the Bec-de-Gaz bar on the rue du Montparnasse in Paris. They were drinking apricot cocktails, the speciality of the house.

Aron said, pointing to his glass: ‘you see, my dear fellow, if you are a phenomenologist, you can talk about this and make philosophy out of it!’ Sartre turned pale with emotion at this. Here was just the thing he had been longing to achieve for years – to describe objects just as he saw and touched them, and extract philosophy from the process. Aron convinced him that phenomenology exactly fitted in with his special preoccupations: bypassing the antithesis of idealism and realism, affirming simultaneously both the supremacy of reason and the reality of the physical world as it appears to our senses. (de Beauvoir 1965:135)

Substitute the term ‘place’ for the apricot-cocktail glass, and you have the overall theme of this book. It puts forward an account of London’s urban landscape by considering it as a constellation of places linked by paths of movement between them.

The aim of this book is to describe these places as faithfully as possible through phenomenological description grounded in participant observation. It is claimed that it is only through ethnographic research that we can understand the reality of contemporary urban experience and the meanings that people give to their lives. We achieve this by a thick description of the deeply sensuous character of the places in which people work and dwell and think and move between. This is a return
from the abstracted character of most discussions of cities to the things themselves, the people themselves and the materiality of the built environment that the people inhabit.

One of the aims of this introduction is to justify this view of London as a collection of places that holistically constitute its urban landscape and make the city what it is and distinct from others. Through the buildings in place, we can understand the people, and through the people the buildings. Through an entangled dialectic, they form part of each other and mediate each other’s existence and significance in the practices of everyday life.

I also attempt to situate the book and the individual studies in it in relation to some of the relevant themes and perspectives in the vast and burgeoning literature on urban studies by social and cultural geographers, sociologists and ethnographers, and, more specifically, from the standpoint of material culture studies in anthropology.

**Big data and the problems of abstraction in urban studies**

In this section I provide a brief critique of the dominant trend in recent urban studies in human and cultural geography and sociology, underlining their shortcomings, to provide a counterpoint to the alternative perspective put forward in this book.

Danny Dorling’s book *The 32 Stops* is an account of the Central Line on the London Underground. The subtitle is *Lives on London’s Central Line* (Dorling 2013). It is one of a series of 13 books in which individual authors write about different London Underground lines through their personal experience of using them, thus conveying a sense of the urban through use of the city’s transport network and the places along it. Dorling’s book is undoubtedly the most accomplished of the series in terms of the manner in which we can understand a succession of different places across the centre of the city, from West Ruislip at the western end to Woodford in the east.

Dorling’s account, written for a popular audience, is in many respects quite typical of mainstream geographical approaches to urban analysis. The 32 Central Line stops simply become names in the account. They are not considered as distinctive places or locales along the line. There is no description of any of them. In this sense, the names are just empty signifiers of place.

Moreover, Dorling has not gained any information about the people living around the underground stations by observing or talking to them,
or by walking around in their vicinity. His work is entirely a desk-based analysis dependent on official and other statistics: GCSE educational scores, numbers of children classified as living in poverty, average household income, life expectancy, percentages of children under 16, voting patterns in relation to political parties, percentages of residents working in banking or the service sector of the economy, and so on. These are graphically represented by bar charts and snippets of information to explain them. For example:

To travel from Bond Street to Holborn is to move towards a swiftly rising rock face. As you journey east, more and more of your neighbours are childless, young and pay high rents, rents that use up most of their incomes. Those few who are elderly have less and less in common with the young. The loneliness may be harming their health. (Dorling 2013:63)

What does stand out about this part of the line [Bethnal Green to Leyton] is how along the course of four widely spaced stops, between 40 per cent and almost half the children are living in poverty. (Dorling 2013:118)

To add ‘colour’ to this story of human geography, a few local facts are added from government and local authority press releases, newspaper articles and gossip columns, and information from the electoral ward, or wards, closest to the stops. All this supposedly represents nearly half a million people who live in the vicinity of the Central Line (Dorling 2013:134). Further ‘colour’, in an attempt to humanise the account, is provided by fictional individual caricatures of the people Dorling imagines to live around the stops. For example, the Harley Street doctor living in the vicinity of Bond Street, with a lucrative consultancy, pleading poverty and exploiting junior staff (Dorling 2013:65–71), or the mother dependent on benefits living in Northolt struggling to support herself and her son (Dorling 2013:12–14), or the black great grandfather living in Leytonstone, a stowaway on a troop ship from Jamaica in the 1940s (Dorling 2013:118–20).

Dorling provides us with many interesting and, indeed, some quite striking statistics, but the people, the places, the architectural forms of the stations and their histories are strikingly absent. He makes up ‘representative’ cardboard characters inhabiting the vicinity of the stops in an attempt, necessary perhaps in a popular work, to compensate for an obvious absence.

A substantial number of human and cultural geographers share with most sociological accounts of cities a similar perspective on the city.
Rather than leaving their desks and engaging with people’s lives, they usually prefer the comfort of an abstracted view of the city. Removing themselves from the streets and the people, they typically like to look down on urban life from above. Cities, such as London, are to be understood not on the basis of how people actually dwell in them and make sense of their lives and identities within particular urban contexts, but in terms of a consideration of abstracted spatial global flows. The actors in this framework are not people relating to each other, but cities themselves personified and anthropomorphised as if they were people.

Viewing the city like gods, some urban geographers dream of producing disembodied macro-spatial maps from which the organising principles of contemporary cities can apparently be deduced without reference to people (e.g. Soja 1996). These are concerned with generalised spatial geographies of resource impacts, capital accumulation and environmental impacts far removed from the day-to-day life of city dwellers and their urban experiences (Davis 2007; Hamnett 2003a; Harvey 1973, 1989, 2001; Soja 1989, 1996).

In a book somewhat curiously entitled *The Urban Experience*, Harvey tells us that:

I am looking to understand the forces that frame the urban process and the urban experience under capitalism. I focus on the themes of money, space and time because thinking about them helps clear away some of the clutter of detail and lay bare the frames of reference within which urbanism proceeds. (Harvey 1989:164)

We might rhetorically ask: whose experience is that? Apparently theoretical abstraction produces its own kind of profound super- or supra-experience entirely removed from people and their doings, framed by the ‘concrete [sic] abstractions of space and time’ and ‘nourished out of the metabolism of capitalist production for exchange on the world market and supported out of a highly sophisticated system of production and distribution organised within its confines’ (Harvey 1989:229). Even Harvey’s recent book *Rebel Cities*, which we might imagine could involve a discussion of people and their values, framed as it is in terms of recent anti-capitalist protests in urban contexts, remains at a resolutely abstract and theoretical level of analysis and discussion (Harvey 2011).

Massey, in her *World City* (2007), has London, rather than an entirely abstracted global urban space in general, as the specific focus of her discussion. The book puts forward a cogent critique, as do Harvey’s theoretical works on urbanism, of a hegemonic neoliberal world based
on deregulation, privatisation and marketisation. This is laudable, but the lack of a more grounded analysis considering the way people actually live and feel seems to detract from the power and veracity of this critique.

The main difference in Massey’s approach is her insistence that globalisation is made in places and needs to be understood in terms of those places. Although the book is about London, with a stress on the specificity of London as a particular kind of place in terms of, for example, its history as an imperial capital, the overwhelming economic dominance of the finance sector, its multicultural kaleidoscopic ethnic character, its cultural diversity, complex political structure, huge wealth and abject poverty, the main focus of this book remains highly abstract. The centre of attention is how the local (London) is a product of the global, and vice versa. She confesses that although the book is ‘centered on London it is not really only about London. It is an essay, rather, that arises from London’ (Massey 2007:12). So, London is both centred and simultaneously decentred from the discussions, entangled in a web of intermediated global and abstracted spatialities.

There is a striking contrast here between this book and some of Massey’s other humanist writings which are grounded in a much more nuanced and sensitive approach to the materiality of place in relation to social identity and people’s lives. See Massey’s discussion of Wythenshawe, Manchester (Massey 2000) and of Kilburn High Street, discussed below.

Amin and Thrift (2002) similarly valuably discuss a much more grounded approach to the everyday life of the city in a general way, yet a so-called ‘relational ontological turn’ (Amin and Thrift 2017) in urban studies unfortunately takes us straight back to abstractions. It now invites us to consider cities as ‘a combinatorial force field’ and as a ‘complex adaptive assemblage’. According to Amin and Thrift (2017), a fresh and novel understanding of ‘urbanicity’ now requires ‘an ontology of many kinds of gravitational force juxtaposed: metabolic networks, infrastructures and built forms, technical systems and institutions, diverse structures of authority, power and intelligence’ (Amin and Thrift 2017:15). Knowing the contemporary city, we are told, requires ‘likening cities to adaptive systems regulated by their combined pluralities and interactions’ (Amin and Thrift 2017:22). This perspective appears to be strikingly akin to old systems theory perspectives, a revamped but veiled style of old functionalist analysis. Furthermore:

This alternative science of the city learns how to scan the knowledge horizon in order to seek out and enjoin expert artefacts, people and
institutions and to harness machine intelligence for the common good. It concerns itself with making visible, rather than taking for granted, the hidden work of algorithms, machines and codes behind the city’s many sociotechnical systems and their effects, so as to make the city fabric a heuristic space in which publics can engage with machine intelligence. (Amin and Thrift 2017:27)

The city apparently ‘sees’. It is both ‘person’ and ‘machine’, but what really matters in this are not the people who actually see in it, but rather a better understanding of its ‘aggregate urban dynamics’ and anonymous networks.

A rather different approach to the urban is taken by Butler and Robson in their book *London Calling* (2003). The principal aim of this piece of sociological research, inspired by the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984) was to investigate the consequences of the manner in which the aspirational middle classes appear to be remaking inner London, displacing in the process traditional working class communities, and whether there might be such a thing as a ‘metropolitan habitus’ in which significant differences emerge between London and provincial British cities, towns and suburbs in terms of the aspirations and lifestyles of the middle classes inhabiting them (Butler and Robson 2003:1).

Following Bourdieu, Butler and Robson conceive of different social groups in terms of the manner in which they deploy stocks of cultural capital (knowledges, skills, tastes, mannerisms, objectified in material form by possessions such as cars, clothing, books, and consumption practices such as food and drink and interests such as going to see particular types of films, engaging in particular sports etc.), economic capital (money and assets) and social capital (networks of friends and acquaintances) in different ways according both to their personal resources and their social aspirations for the kind of neighbourhood they wish to live in: ‘perceptions of space and place are crucial in explaining how capital is deployed in building neighbourhoods’ (Butler and Robson 2003:11).

Bourdieu’s concept of the ‘habitus’ was intended to link the individual decisions people take about their lives and deep underlying structuring principles that constitute societies as a whole. Thus the intention was to avoid the opposition between the individual and individual differences and underlying ordering collective structural principles governing the social world. Bourdieu emphasised that the habitus has an endless generative capacity to produce thoughts, actions, ideas, perceptions and emotions, giving social life both its
relative predictability and freedom. However, as many commentators have pointed out, the overwhelming emphasis in Bourdieu’s account is on social reproduction rather than change. The weight of historical tradition and the material environment both constrain and condition people’s access to material and non-material resources alike. There is a continuous dialectic between the generative structures of the habitus, agency and meaning.

Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984) analyses the cultural basis of ‘taste’ in French society in the 1960s. The fundamental structural opposition here became social class – France as a class-divided society. Different social classes are argued to possess distinct dispositions to purchase various kinds of food and other consumer goods, read particular kinds of newspapers and books, engage in different kinds of sport, visit art galleries, museums and exhibitions or not, listen to different kinds of music and so on. Bourdieu regards them as being involved in a never-ending struggle to acquire, maintain and reproduce different forms of capital: economic (money, access to material resources), social (networks, relations with other people), cultural (legitimate and legitimated knowledges), symbolic (prestige, fame and social honour). These forms of capital can be converted into each other. So, money can buy private education and access to different social networks and prestige. People’s tastes and preferences, lifestyles and patterns of consumption, become objectified through the clothes they buy and wear, the foods they eat, their table manners, the kinds of cars they drive, the kinds of social events and performances with which they engage, and so on in a systematic and predictable manner.

This is the underlying conceptual framework on which Butler and Robson (2003) draw. However, in their actual research practice they use ACORN (consumer survey) clusters to systematically investigate links between housing, employment, education and consumption and the way people ‘realise’ different forms of habitus in seven different study areas in London. ACORN clusters are a popular marketing analysis tool, grouping together what is known of the inhabitants of different types of areas by their consumption patterns. These profiles are accessible via postcode data. Overall, ACORN produces 54 ‘ideal type’ profiles of postcode areas of the UK as a whole.

The neighbourhoods analysed in Butler and Robson’s 2003 study – Barnsbury, Telegraph Hill, Brixton, Battersea, Docklands, with subdivisions in a couple of cases – are characterised in terms of the ACORN cluster typology, so Telegraph Hill is a ‘type 24 area – partially gentrified multiethnic’ (Butler and Robson 2003:57) and Barnsbury ‘type 21,
prosperous enclaves, highly qualified executives... very affluent neighbour- 
hoods containing well-educated, mobile, younger professionals living in flats' (Butler and Robson 2003:53).

The types of houses people live in and the material possessions they have do not form part of the analysis. Similarly, the built environment and the character and texture of these places/study areas is scarcely described. The residential neighbourhoods are represented solely as a series of framed street maps, and nothing more. In terms of conveying a sense of the nature and character of these places, the names, as in Dorling’s 2013 study, are empty of any content. The character of the streets and the materiality of the built environment, the houses people live in and their material possessions are all apparently insignificant in relation to the social construction of the habitus of their inhabitants or, at the very least, remain taken for granted and not worth describing or discussing.

Socially, Barnsbury is characterised, by Butler and Robson’s analysis, as having the following characteristics: high numbers of graduates and professionals; a high propensity towards vegetarianism and taking exercise; below-average car ownership, but a tendency for those with cars to buy new and expensive models; buying CDs and hardback books in greater than average numbers; double the average proportion of those earning over £40,000 per annum; being well provided with pensions; by far the most popular daily paper being the Guardian. People from Barnsbury take holidays in far-flung destinations, tend to drink and eat out, and shun traditional British food. Playing sport, and visiting museums and galleries, theatre and cinema are ‘enormously popular’, and by a long margin the people are gin drinkers (Butler and Robson 2003:53). In a concluding note, Butler and Robson state, ‘It is only necessary to spend a short time in Islington to confirm that this judgement is likely to be accurate for the most part’ (Butler and Robson 2003:53). People are reduced to a stereotype of the statistics, and it is apparently only necessary to spend a short time in the neighbourhood being studied to know everything that is significant about it.

Highly valuable but all too brief and highly selected personal interview data is presented from respondents in each area in chapters 5 and 8 of Butler and Robson’s 2003 book. These interviews provide some useful personal insights into aspects of the lives of the gentrifiers. But in the text, the interviews seem instead to ultimately play a similar rhetorical role to Dorling’s fictional characters (in Dorling 2013) – to humanise an abstracted statistical account. Dorling makes up the lives
of his characters; Butler and Robson select some of their words instead, but the overwhelming emphasis of their study is based on an analysis of age, occupation, household income and composition. This facilitates the residents to be assigned to eight social classes and socio-economic groups. The real people talking thus become little more than a mirror of the statistics and the social categories derived from them. In the case of Barnsbury, an upmarket ‘super-gentrified’ area of Islington in north London, the people are drinking their gin, going to ethnically themed restaurants and reading, of course, the *Guardian*.

The inner-London middle-class gentrifiers, Butler and Robson’s 2003 book concludes, are cosmopolitan in their outlook in contrast to the non-middle class in London and also those in other UK cities. Here they include their middle classes, although this remains an assertion without evidential basis. Butler and Robson assert that the middle classes living in London at the beginning of the twenty-first century are living in the “great society” which has now moved beyond urban and national boundaries into the global stage (Butler and Robson 2003:165). The diversity of London enables an extraordinary flexible form of the urban habitus to emerge in different areas (Butler and Robson 2003:192–3). This conclusion does not make any reference to the different places studied, so we get the impression that gentrification is pretty much the same everywhere in London, as are the gentrifiers. While there may be differences among them, their commonalities of a shared habitus result in similar attitudes and beliefs, strategies and perspectives in their lives.

But it is apparent from Butler and Robson’s highly mobile and relatively affluent informants, who could live somewhere else, that the actual place where they chose to live mattered to them. Place mattered over price: ‘people decided roughly where to live and then found a house or flat they could afford’ (Butler and Robson 2003:75). Some of Butler and Robson’s informants stated that they could not imagine living anywhere else: ‘It’s very friendly and very mixed – it’s got diversity and a nice community feel about it. This is one of the nicest places in London – I have strong feelings about it’ (Butler and Robson: 2003:82; informant speaking about Barnsbury); ‘It’s very pleasant and incredibly popular. Everything is here, you haven’t got to go over the river for everything you want – we have our own department stores. It’s very safe, very middle class’ (Butler and Robson: 2003:85; informant speaking about Battersea). These sentiments are quite obviously place bound, and, if they had been explored further in the interviews and through walking with the informants around their neighbourhoods and spending more time with them, might have shown a far greater depth and variety in
attachments to place in terms of the construction of individual and group identities than is evident from the book.

This general style of analysis has become de rigueur in urban sociology, adopted by many to characterise not only gentrifying neighbourhoods, but extending beyond this to consider nations and class structure in general (e.g. Bennett et al. 2009; Savage et al. 2015). In such work, it is Bourdieu’s concept of social field rather than the more inclusive notion of habitus that has dominated. This is the manner in which struggles take place in relation to specific resources – cultural goods, housing, education, employment, political power, prestige, and so on – and access to them. It is a structured system of social positions occupied by individuals or institutions.

Butler and Robson (2003) examine four fields in their study – employment, housing, consumption and education – based on a statistical analysis, but the problem with this is that it only provides a shallow aggregate view of collective behaviour. The individual people discussed are only considered important insofar as they become token, or totemic, representations of wider generalised occupational and social categories: higher managerial and professional, old male, Somali woman, white working-class unmarried mother, and so on.

Read today, Bourdieu’s own account of French society seems peculiarly stereotyped, if it was indeed ever really like this. One of the primary problems with Bourdieu’s original research in Distinction, inspiring London Calling, was that it was carried out in the form of a large-scale statistical analysis based on brief interviews and a questionnaire survey, a methodological strategy more or less repeated in the more recent British sociological studies. Again, these scholars rarely feel the need to move from their desks, engage with and meet with people, participate (in the classical anthropological sense of participant observation) and engage in their lives for more than the brief period of conducting a questionnaire or a personal household interview, or listening to a focus group discussion. They do not usually observe houses or study their interiors in detail, analyse the contents of the home and the manner in which material culture is ordered (or disordered), attend football matches with their informants, go to pubs or restaurants in a neighbourhood, spend time in markets or parks, or walk repeatedly up and down streets (once is normally enough) to conduct their research.

A common feature of all these conceptualisations of the urban is that abstracted general theoretical frameworks are applied to the urban from the top down, and the city is understood and ‘experienced’ in terms
of them. The city becomes dematerialised in the process. An obvious counterpoint is an attempt to do the reverse – to understand the urban from the bottom up, from the people themselves, in which the generalisations about city life arise from the lives of city dwellers, the streets, the neighbourhoods, the squares, the parks, the markets, the housing estates, the buildings themselves – a stress on the materiality of the city as being constituted in terms of persons and places and relations between them. This is the project of this book.

Bourdieu himself was interested in not just documenting differences in taste and lifestyles, but how these are mobilised in struggles for status and prestige and naturalised in various ways, made to appear self-evident and non-arbitrary. ‘Cultured’ individuals regard their own cultural distinction as taken for granted, normal and beyond dispute, natural, an inherent marker of their social value and status. It is taken for granted, rarely discussed, part of their everyday world, and materialised or made visible in their everyday practices.

In Bourdieu’s ethnography of the Kabyle, a Berber community, the house itself was understood as the principal locus for the material objectification of the generative schemes, or underlying structures, from which the habitus arises; here, the actions of individuals are conceived in terms of structured binary oppositions that make up the habitus (inside/outside, dry/wet, male/female, east/west and so on) (Bourdieu 1977:89ff.; 1992, appendix). The process of socialisation into becoming a member of society is mediated through the house ‘through the intermediary of the divisions and hierarchies it sets up between things, persons and practices, this tangible classifying system, continuously inculcates and reinforces the taxonomic principles underlying all the arbitrary provisions of the culture’ (Bourdieu 1977:89).

Thus the house for Bourdieu was, in the context of Kabyle society, a material objectification of the habitus that is simultaneously embodied in the practices of those who dwell there. The material manifestation of the habitus becomes inculcated in the socialisation of children, the way they think and feel and understand themselves. Furthermore, the material manifestation of the habitus finds tangible material expression in the spatial divisions of the house and the practical taxonomies of the arrangements of material culture within it. Put another way, people think through the house and the structured assemblage of things within it. Thus, through living in a particular material environment, people come to know themselves and how to act, how to go on in the world, and this is a largely unconscious process of living and doing. In this analytical framework, social practices that incorporate things thus arise from the
habitus or generative schemes and dispositions on which people draw. But through their practice, and through the practical outcomes and unintended consequences of their actions, this is also, in principle at least, open to continuous improvisation and change. In this theoretical framework, we do not move from mind to material objectifications of that mind, because the mind that is predisposed to think in a certain way is itself a product of material objectifications; a dialectic exists.

The importance of all this resides in the claims made by Bourdieu that there are systematic homologies in people’s lifestyle choices that are objectified through a whole gamut of material forms and activities without which social status could neither be marked out or recognised. The things themselves objectify who people are. The qualities and forms of these things consumed, used and displayed become embodied – that is, they form part of the manner in which people think and feel about themselves and their relations to others. Things and their significance, the house, the built environment, are all conspicuously absent in Butler and Robson’s and most sociological urban studies.

Emphasising the role and significance of material forms in constituting social lives is thus an alternative perspective that arises directly from Bourdieu’s work and is emphasised in this book. Such a perspective has provided inspiration for many material culture studies in anthropology; we study the intimate details of people’s lives, the wider landscapes that they inhabit, the manner in which they appropriate, in a consumer society, an alienated system of commodities, select and personalise them and make them their own in their dress, the furnishing and provisioning of the home, or in terms of the contents of their fridges, the way they cook, what they store in the attic or throw away, how they tend their gardens, and so on. The power and significance of the material world in constructing people’s lives is persistently overlooked and remains unacknowledged in most urban studies. This book is intended to provide a kind of antidote to that perspective.

More specifically, this book provides a broadly phenomenologically inspired anthropological alternative to the abstractions of many urban studies, from the perspective of a substantial body of research in anthropological material culture studies focusing on the manner in which people make things and places their own through their practices, and vice versa the manner in which things and people co-construct their identities and social relations (see, e.g., Appadurai 1986; Buchli 2002, 2013; Gell 1998; Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007; Hoskins 1998, 2006; Miller 1998a, 2009, 2010; Tilley 2007; Tilley et al. 2006; Tilley 2017; Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017; Weiner 1992).
Phenomenological perspectives

Phenomenology is, above all, a philosophical position emphasising the basis of all our experience and knowledge of the world in situated small embodied acts (Abram 1997; Csordas 1990; Desjarlais and Throop 2011; Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1968; Tilley 1994, 2004, 2008, 2010; Tilley and Cameron Daum 2017). That is to say that we engage with material and social worlds through our immersion within them. We are part of them, and they are part of us; we feel the world of which we are a part, and that world feels us, our presence, our carnal being. Direct sensory experience of this world is a fundamental and primary part of our social being-in-the-world. We perceive and understand how and why to act and go on through the fleshy medium of our embodied selves; through participating in the social and material worlds, we seek to understand and reflecting on them.

The concept of embodiment provides the fundamental starting point to discuss, phenomenologically, the constitution of social identities in place. The immediacy of our embodied experiences of the world has a profound effect on the manner in which we relate to both persons and things, and the things themselves and the places in which they are found are extensions of the self. So social identity is about the body in the mind. The manner in which identity gets thought through relates to the manner in which agency is experienced through the body in place and in relation to things that extend it, such as the walker and her stick.

The description of materiality for the phenomenologist is the process of revealing the world that she or he encounters. It is not a low-level activity to be superseded by subsequent so-called abstract analysis of sensorial ‘data’. To describe the world as fully and faithfully as we possibly can is always potentially to re-describe it and make that world anew, to see and feel and understand it in a different and revelatory manner. Thus, through the process of such research, we come to a more profound understanding of our own lives and those of others. Such description is inevitably selective; we cannot describe the entire world in which we and others are immersed, but we can highlight in our research what appears to be most significant. This is, if you like, the analysis that takes place within a phenomenological descriptive account.

Our descriptions are inevitably personal insofar as we cannot escape our own embodied engagement with the world from which they all flow. However, through observing and reflecting and talking to others and experiencing, through our participation, the material sensorious worlds with which they and we engage, we go beyond the self to reach an
understanding that is broader and sensitive to cultural and political contexts, gender and identities, power and dominance, resistance and difference.

It is unfortunate that most negative commentaries on a phenomenological approach consistently and fatally conflate two very different aspects of experience: the personal and the subjective. They are not the same thing. Social research is inevitably subjective, since claims to a disembodied objectivity are simply myths inherited from the Enlightenment. We cannot escape our own bodies and sensory experiences. They are who we are and how we live. But the aim is to understand others and their worlds by reaching out, feeling, understanding, describing – beyond the petty limits of our own personal experiences – to engage with those of others and their sensorious engagement in the world.

Place

One very significant foundational philosophical tradition for understanding place comes from Heidegger’s later thought. He stresses an intimate link between building, thinking and dwelling (Heidegger 2003). Dwelling is the essence of being-in-the-world. Building and thinking are intimately related as modes of dwelling. One form of philosophy going back to Descartes and ‘I think therefore I am’ is one that separates mind from body and the rational free-thinking subject from the world. By contrast, Heidegger’s philosophy emphasises embeddedness. People think and act through dwelling, and this is a fundamental part of being human. Being rooted in one place is for Heidegger the proper condition for social being. Place provides ontological security. Places, like buildings or trees, are rooted in their very materiality. People dwell and think through places that have their own singular material characteristics. Places take on their significance through the manner in which we interact with them. Therefore, human consciousness is place bound. We have different intentional relationships to places in accordance with whether we live there, work there, or visit them briefly.

Knowledge of the world that is emplaced results in attitudes of care and concern for that place. We make sense of the world through the materiality of the things around us, not through abstract conceptual schemes. They are a matter of body rather than of mind. Places in all their concrete particularity create a sense of belonging, a centre from which to understand ourselves and our relation to the world. Dwelling is about the spiritual unity of people in relation to the earth and the sky. The earth is the ground on which people dwell, the source of all
fruitfulness and growth. People dwell on the earth and under the sky. They are between earth and sky. The sky is the domain of the movements of the sun and the moon, the stars, the light of the day, dusk and dawn, of the weather of cloud formations, source of water, and so on. People live in relation to the earth and the sky (a vertical axis) and in relation to near and far, insides and outsides (a horizontal axis).

All places are thus constituted by a figure/ground relationship. Places are figures against grounds, a square or street or park in a city. One cannot be understood except in relation to another. Above all, places are foci that gather. They gather people, events, emotions, memories, stories, histories, meanings and associations. As such, they provide both the medium and outcome of dwelling.

**Everyday life**

A primary source complementing Heidegger’s understanding of place as the centre of social being is the work of de Certeau and his collaborators on the practices of everyday life (de Certeau 1984; de Certeau, Giard and Mayol 1998). They too underline the significance of place, examining both its ‘poetic’ and its expressive elements and its inevitable pluralist characteristics. Life is lived from a point of view, a situation, being in place, resulting in an inclination, a tendency and disposition to behave and think and act in different ways.

The discussion by Mayol of the neighbourhood and the street (in de Certeau, Giard and Mayol 1998) is particularly relevant here to the theme of this book. The organisation of life is articulated in two main ways. First there is the manner in which people behave in the street, translated in dress, politeness codes (greetings etc.), the rhythm of walking and the avoidance of or the frequency of trips to particular places. Second is the expected symbolic benefits of behaving in particular ways. This is largely non-discursive, rooted in cultural tradition and appearing in a partial or fragmented way in the walk and the manner in which the walker uses or ‘consumes’ public space. The neighbourhood exists as a kind of social commitment, an act of coexisting with others, be they neighbours or shopkeepers or joggers, who are all linked by both proximity of encounters and repetition (de Certeau, Giard and Mayol 1998:8). ‘A “practice” is what is decisive for the identity of the dweller or a group insofar as this identity allows him or her to take up a position in the network of relations inscribed in the environment’ (de Certeau, Giard and Mayol 1998:9).
The lived-in neighbourhood allows one to acquire a certain mastery of it because of its familiarity, a known place in which persons know both themselves and that they are recognised by others. The public space of the city as a whole remains anonymous in contrast with the neighbourhood in which, little by little, people come to know themselves in relation to others. The neighbourhood is primarily known through the feet. It is a place in between the private interior place of the dwelling and the mostly unknown totality of the city. It mediates an interior inside place and an exterior outside space: ‘It is less an urban surface transparent for everyone or statistically measurable, than the possibility offered everyone to inscribe in the city a multitude of trajectories whose hard core permanently remains the private sphere’ (de Certeau, Giard and Mayol 1998:11).

Analogies may be drawn here between arranging one’s own interior place in a house or a flat and arranging one’s trajectories through urban space. Within the house, we find the ‘comfort’ of the things that surround us, an intimate phenomenology of space from the basement to the attic (Bachelard 1969); in the neighbourhood, we find the ‘comfort’ of the familiarity of a built environment through which we can move at ease, because it is a known configuration of streets and buildings and places. From childhood, one becomes socialised not only in the home but in the neighbourhood, or in multiple neighbourhoods, as one grows up and moves. The house and neighbourhood become part of the habitus of the urban dweller, and now they are usually separated from the place of work to which one commutes, rather than strolls directionally, covering the most ground in the least amount of time.

The subject living in a neighbourhood effectively both poeticises part of the city and individualises it, makes it his or her own. Socially it can be characterised as a collective organisation of individual trajectories (de Certeau, Giard and Mayol 1998:15) in which the neighbours who surround you and live next to you are neither too close to bother you but never too far away to avoid. A good relationship with neighbours requires the practical mastery of social skills, adhering to a system of values and embodied relationships allowing people to get on and feel at ease or not, smiling or not smiling, being friendly or otherwise, the everyday symbolic capital of bodily gestures, words and phrases intimately related to gender, age, ethnicity and class.

A wonderful characterisation of the everyday life of a particular neighbourhood is found in Mayol’s discussion of the Croix-Rousse neighbourhood of Lyons (de Certeau, Giard and Mayol 1998:62ff.). This starts from the R family’s double apartment and a discussion of the intimacy
of family relations. From there, the narrative proceeds into the rue Rivet, in which we meet Robert the greengrocer at one end of the street and La Germaine’s grocery at the other. The account provides, among other things, a discussion of the everyday practice of shopping for groceries, the significance of bread and wine, the passage from the market to the cafe, and the contrasting forms of embodied socialities in these different settings.

The sheer complexity of even the simplest and most ordinary of social acts is underlined in the narrative. In the light of such an approach, the urban theorist’s dream of capturing the essence of a city in terms of its monstrous abstracted and reticulated spatialities and networks collapses like a house of cards. All that they regard as somehow solid knowledge melts into air. The materiality and sociality of the city itself resists any attempt at an all-encompassing panoptic approach. We rediscover once more people and place and how people actually dwell.

This book builds on the perspectives of Heidegger and de Certeau in a general way, but more specifically on a considerable alternative body of literature, impossible to discuss in a short introduction, by humanistic geographers, environmental psychologists, anthropologists and others who have explored in a great diversity of ways the platial characteristics of dwelling and various forms of place attachment involving the bonding of people to place and the manner in which these may take multiple forms, bringing forth a range of different emotions and experiences (see, e.g., Adams, Hoelscher and Till 2001; Appadurai 1986; Atkinson, Fuller and Painter 2016; Buttimer and Seamon 1980; Cresswell 2004; Feld and Basso 1996; Lovell 1998; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003; Manzo and Devin-Wright 2014; Relph 1976; Seamon 1993; Taun 1974, 1977).

The most general points to be made here are that understanding the urban landscape from a phenomenological perspective involves considering the city in terms of the concrete specificity of its places and in terms of mobility and flows between them, in relation to other places outside the city, and in terms of rhythms and practices of everyday life. Places are integral to the setting and staging of everyday life as opposed to space that is merely an abstract container for it. They form the arena for a grounded phenomenology of the city. A place within a city may be a tree or a monument, a street corner, a cafe or pub, a meeting place, an underground or railway station, a street, a market, a park, a neighbourhood, a housing estate or a suburb. Places thus contain other places on a sliding scale or like a series of Russian dolls, one inside the other. They may have relatively clear or demarcated boundaries, beginnings or ends, passages into and out of them. The term is thus ambiguous and slippery.
This does not matter except when one wants to compare one kind of place with another, in which case they need to be of the same scale or material character. Thus one might compare different streets, but not a street and a suburb.

**Place, biography, memory**

While space remains an abstract, ‘empty’ analytical concept, places are always tangible and physical, their meanings built up by the people who inhabit, use or move through them (Tilley 1994). Places in the urban landscape forge individual and collective biographies, shared histories and memories, creating various forms of affective associations. Places, like people, have individual names, and these names form their identities as places, how they are understood, and how they may come to be represented in words and images. Thinking through places is a primary way in which people understand their world.

A striking counterpoint to Dorling’s statistical analysis of London’s Central Line, discussed above, is found in Augé’s (2002) anthropological account of the Paris Metro. The subway map is one that brings forth personal memories. The names of the stations relate strongly to the biographies of people who live near them and use them from childhood onwards. The names are indelibly linked to the names of friends, families, colleagues, events, meetings and a host of other associations. Some, not visited, remain just names on the map; others are replete with associative memories of place. The personal sequencing and itineraries fostered by the Metro are shared with others in rhythms of movement and daily passage. The subway lines ‘like lifelines on the hand, meet and cross – not only on the map where the interlacing of their multicolour routes unwinds and is set in place, but in everyone’s lives and minds’ (Augé 2002:6). A regular traveller on a line has a certain economy of using it, knowing exactly where to board a train in order to be closest to the exit when they get off, and how to move through individual stations, and, through a keen attention to sound, when to walk slowly or to rush. They know how to adapt themselves to the throng of bodies at rush hour, how long it will take between individual stops, where the journey becomes noisy and where it is quieter on the line. These are the daily routinised and embodied habitual skills of using the Metro. The names of certain stations recall a wider history and monuments and streets and events, memories of the past in the present. Names connect people and the past in the present. This is the Metro of everyday life.
Both discursive consciousness, thoughts that are verbalised and can be discussed, and practical habitual routinised activities that are lived rather than thought through are always related to places. They take place in place. Place is thus an elemental existential fact, and the social construction of a sense of place is a universal experiential medium. Places, rather than spaces, are the manner in which people understand their urban landscapes. Every narrative about the city and city life invariably traces its course in an arrangement of dwellings and streets and squares that are joined by paths of movement. The sum of the life of a city dweller can, therefore, be conceptualised in terms of the places in which he or she has been through and between which he or she moves.

The urban landscape is thus a set of platial rather than abstracted spatial relationships, in which the existence of one place depends on its relationship with another and its mode of directional encounter. According to how and from where and when one approaches a place, it may appear to be entirely different, and in relation to how one moves, what one experiences as one moves to the left or right, or whether one continues moving straight ahead, or in terms of looking up or down or towards something or whether one encounters it suddenly or from a long distance away.

Contestation

Because places are always plural, they are as often as not contested, because different individuals and groups are likely to think about them and value or not value them in different ways (Bender 1993, 2006; Bender and Winer 2001; Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017). In this sense, places are never static. Places themselves are in a continual process of being and becoming places. De Certeau (1984) strongly emphasised places as sites of resistance in the city, and practices of walking as both appropriation of the topographical system of streets and places, a spatial acting out of the place and an act of resistance to the city planners: ‘walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects etc. the trajectories it “speaks”’ (de Certeau 1984:99).

The contested character of place is one of the major themes informing the discussions in the individual chapters of this book. Melhuish (chapter 2) relates this to people’s age and their length of occupancy, where people dwell within the Brunswick Centre, and whether they are regarded as insiders or outsiders in terms of family ties and commitments. These are also key factors in Yates’s discussion.
of the Beavers/Meadows west London housing estate (chapter 3). Differences are highlighted here between a group of old ladies who moved into the estate immediately after it was built and people who were housed there later, between those with strong family ties and those without, and between the group of ‘boys’ who hang out at the betting shop and around the ‘stones’ – an outdoor meeting place on the eastern periphery of the state. The material isolation and insulation of the estate from its surroundings means that social and ethnic tensions within it become accentuated, while at the same time strong community ties exist between some of its residents. The estate is both refuge and prison in relation to the outside world. The young and not so young men taking drugs, smoking, drinking, visiting the betting shop and urinating in a nearby alley are both feared for their antisocial behaviour but also appreciated by different groups of residents, as they are like an unofficial police force. They are acutely attuned to the presence of unwelcome strangers, faces they do not recognise, and act as a deterrent to them entering the estate.

Young’s account of a taxi rank (chapter 8) examines the direct manner in which contest takes place between black-cab drivers and Uber drivers and the perceived threat to the living of former by the latter. Both Yates (chapter 3) and Wilson (chapter 6) show how contestation is linked to feelings of threat and uncertainty and resistance to an outside world. It becomes part and parcel of the fabric of the place itself.

**The routes of places and non-places**

An increasingly prominent thread in considerations of the city is that the significance of place has been eroded in our ‘post-modernity’. If places were significant in the past, they are now less so, lacking clear boundaries and any sense of community or ethnic coherence. We are in an entirely different world from Heidegger’s idealised and essentially conservative vision of the Black Forest rural white German community forming the basis for his reflections on identity, dwelling and belonging to place (Heidegger 2003), or Mayol’s discussion of the everyday life of French-speaking kith and kin in Lyons in the mid 1970s (de Certeau, Giard and Mayol 1998). It is perhaps then an inherently unsatisfactory way to characterise place in London or any other contemporary town or city after all. Rather than talking about the rootedness of place in an essentially conservative manner in relation to the lives and identities of its inhabitants, we need to think instead about the routes of place, how
places have been completely transformed through movement and an increasingly cosmopolitan culture of the city (Blokland 2017; Clifford 1997; Hall 2012; Jones and Jackson 2014a; Massey 1997; Rapport and Dawson 1998).

The local and the global represent two poles in relation to how people conceive of their identities and how they live. Local constructions of identity are rooted in places, and their counterpart is a different kind of identity related to multiple places that are mediated and generalised, involving a loss of place attachment in the construction of the self. Globalisation, the development of transnational communities, and the space–time compression provided by travel and communications technologies undoubtedly produce new understandings of place that are both hybridised and contingent. Previous notions of a static distinctiveness of place are being transformed through connections to the world beyond, through labour migrations and diasporas, internationalisation of economic structures and consumer products, tourism, flexibility and mobility in labour markets, and so on. The boundaries of global cities, where they might begin or end, how far their global influence extends, become increasingly blurred and problematic. Cities are thus betwixt and between, borderlands between sameness and uniqueness – in Massey’s terms, ‘meeting places’ (Massey 2007).

But even if the places of the city are increasingly hybrid meeting places, they are still places, and we can investigate the character of meeting and gatherings in these places, something impossible at the scale of the city itself. Appadurai (1996), Eriksen (2010), Hannerz (1996) and others have cogently argued that globalisation, rather than eroding the identities and significance of place, has instead resulted in their growing diversity and differentiation. It produces place but in a different kind of way.

Massey’s brief discussion of Kilburn in north London is a celebration of its multi-ethnic diversity and hybridity (Massey 1997). A walk down its high street immediately reveals its diversity, as does the way they people dress and the activities they are engaged in. It is a place constituted by multiple personal identities related to gender, age and class, and communities within it, and its own history in terms of the outside world and what happens within. These together constitute its platial uniqueness.

In a similar fashion, Hall discusses the Walworth Road in south London as an arena in which multi-ethnic culture is visible in the street itself, its shops and signage, and in interactions between the proprietors of its small independent shops and the customers within
them. Her research starts from the place itself, the street rather than a category of people within its neighbourhood. She notes that:

People’s lives and livelihoods were inevitably more complex and far more differentiated than the less cluttered logic of the theoretical frame. The value of ethnography in understanding difference is that it renders a situated and multivocal sense of people and places as they live in, respond to and shape their social worlds. (Hall 2012: 8)

Hall describes everyday life in the street from the vantage point of the cafe and the tailor’s shop. From these small places within the place and the details of bodily gestures, dress and speech, everyday life is emphasised in its social performance.

While Kilburn High Street and the Walworth Road might, through an examination of the generalised population statistics in relation to ethnicity, seem pretty much the same, both have their own identities as places. The primary difference between Massey’s and Hall’s accounts resides partly in the ethnographic depth of Hall’s study, whereas Massey’s discussion is based more on a casual observations and personal reflections, but also in the conceptualisation of the character of these streets and neighbourhoods. For Massey, a global sense of the local needs conjoining with a global sense of place. But as Hall points out, this conflation of the global and the local does not really cope very well with place specificity, with sub-worlds within them that may be both bounded and introverted (Hall 2012:99).

Augé has argued that, in what he calls our ‘hypermodernity’, a new category of place has increasingly developed. Cities are now characterised by a proliferation of ‘non-places’ (Augé 1995). ‘If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place’ (Augé 1995:77–8). These non-places are air, rail and motorway routes, airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, supermarkets, and large retail outlets such as shopping malls (this perspective, it needs to be noted, contrasts curiously with his later account of the Paris Metro, which is definitely not a non-place). These non-places are characterised in terms of the journeys made in them, the discourses that take place in them and their relation to the identities of the people who use them. In these non-places, referring to de Certeau’s discussions of everyday life, it is an abstracted notion of space that dominates. The non-places are constructed in relation to
Materialising the urban landscape

certain ends, transport, transit, commerce, leisure and the relations that individuals have with them (Augé 1995:94). This is a matter of passing through rather than dwelling, of fleeting, transitory and vicarious experiences and relations people have with them. In the big supermarket, ‘the customer wanders around in silence, reads labels, weighs fruit and vegetables on a machine… then hands his credit card to a young woman as silent as himself – anyway, not very chatty – who runs each article past the sensor of a decoding machine before checking the validity of the customer’s credit card’ (Augé 1995:100). The user of a supermarket or an airport is essentially both alone but also one of many, but in a contractual relation with it, manifested in presenting their boarding card at the check-in desk of the airport or payment in a supermarket. The space of non-place ‘creates neither singular identity nor relations. Only solitude and similitude’ (Augé 1995:103).

Augé only conceives his non-places in terms of the person who passes through them, and here one can see a certain veracity in the argument. But for the people who work in the airport or the shopping mall or travel on the underground, it becomes a familiar place that they know intimately and so forms part of their biography and identity. Even the most recent of non-places has its history and its own materiality. Shopping malls can instead be argued to be new meeting points and gathering places for identity construction in place (see Miller et al.’s 1998 discussion of the Brent Cross shopping mall in north London and Wood Green in relation to family structure, household provisioning, ethnicity and class). The manner in which people think about themselves and their situation is not simply a matter of the mind, and people do not usually think about the city or anywhere else in terms of abstractions but in terms of their embodied experiences, which are always materially situated. Places are thus a highly variable resource for personal and collective reflection. Different experiences of places give rise to varying emotional and personal responses. Places are not inert, and their sheer materiality means that we cannot think about them in any way we like. They provide sensuous resources for thought and understanding, discussed below.

**Sensory engagement in place**

Our bodily perceptual experiences are both the medium and outcome of research that takes place in and through our own bodies and those of others in relation to place. The sensing and sensed body itself is our
primary research tool. We take our bodies into places and learn from them. Put another way, this is to intermesh fleshy corporeality and bricks, concrete and stone, people and things, emotions and practices, being and becoming, the material and the immaterial, the virtual and the tangible.

In the process of either living or doing research, we do not go about seeing the world around us or hearing, tasting and smelling it, or feeling it externally through reaching out or internally through the kin-aesthetics of our bodies. All our perceptual senses mingle in and through our engagement in the world and all at once. Perception, affect, emotion, and habitual or discursive consciousness are all simultaneously part and parcel of our entangled immersion and co-presence in the material and social world that we inhabit. Therefore, all our sensory experiences cannot be neatly extracted or abstracted from each other, except of course in the limiting cases of blindness, loss of smell or hearing, or other modes of sensory disablement and deprivation.

Our engagement with and participation in the world always involves all our senses and all at once. I have always found two consistent and repeated claims or analytical and methodological positions in some of the growing literature on the senses as rather odd. The first is that the senses can be isolated from each other in packaged studies of vision, taste, touch, sound and smell that do not consider or that sideline the others (e.g. Bull and Back 2003; Classen 2005; Dikovitskaya 2005; Korsmeyer 2005). We may need to write about these different sensory perceptions separately, simply because of the sheer flux of sensations that bombard us all at once for analytical convenience, but to isolate them is a fundamental mistake. The second is the notion that certain senses are more important than the others historically or cross-culturally (e.g. Classen, Howes and Synnot 1994). Neither of these claims can be maintained from the standpoint of a phenomenological position of embodied being in the world. They in fact potentially limit our understanding, through their concentration on one sense and relative lack of consideration of, for example, visual engagement in taste, the smells of sounds, the touch of colours, the taste of smell or the sounds of vision. These are normal and universal human capacities for perceptual experiences, although of course the particular form that they take inevitably varies between individuals and groups within different cultures and through time. Such studies are not phenomenological, to their detriment, because they fail to take embodied multi-sensorial experience seriously enough in trying to claim that one rather than another sensory dimension of experience is fundamental in a culture or a historical epoch.
Our own contemporary culture has, over and over again, been claimed to be one in which the visual and visual culture dominates, and vision itself has been commonly regarded as the ‘noblest’ and by far the most significant of the senses (for excellent discussions, see, among many others: Burnett 1995; Jay 1994). But as everyone who has actually experienced living knows, this is simply an abstracted analytical academic vision that dangerously simplifies and rarefies our full multi-sensorial being and relationship to the world, which comes to us all at once rather than in partitioned sensory experiences.

There can, therefore, be no such things as cultures of vision or cultures of sound, although in different social and material consequences one or a few of our perceptual senses may dominate and appear to be far more important in reaching an understanding of how people relate to their worlds than others in particular contexts.

The aim of phenomenological multi-sensory research is deceptively simple. It is to produce a richly nuanced and evocative description of the world that people inhabit, to convey an understanding of the sensorial ordering of cultures and subcultures, the smells and sounds and tastes, touch and visual aspects of social being in place (Classen 1993; Helliwell 1996; Howes 2005; Howes 2005a; Rhys-Taylor 2017; Serres, Sankey and Cowley 2008; Sutton 2001). It is to try and bring forth into words that which is never normally said, through participant observation, to produce a richly textured and nuanced account.

From this perspective, cities are beginning to be understood not only in terms of their obvious visuality, but in relation to their multi-sensorial characteristics (Degen 2008, 2014; Edensor 2006, 2014) or in terms of a focus on their particular soundscapes (Adams, Hoelscher and Till 2001; Back 2007; Bull 2000), design and their tactile characteristics (Sasaki 2000) and their tastes and smells (Diaconu 2016; Henshaw 2015; Rhys-Taylor 2013, 2014, 2017).

Recent work by Rhys-Taylor in his sensory ethnography of east London (Rhys-Taylor 2017) is particularly pertinent to highlight here. Rhys-Taylor has shown the huge potential for understanding the city in a strikingly different manner through the medium of the senses. Specifically, Rhys-Taylor discusses how the city can be understood through its smells and tastes, and how these sensory dimensions powerfully constitute the multicultural aspects of city life in the markets and streets through which he walks and senses. In doing so, he underlines the critique that the lack of attention to the actual experiences of those who dwell in the city is severely detrimental to understanding the problems faced by those living in them and finding
solutions to those problems. Rhys-Taylor’s book concerns itself with the ‘heat of chilli peppers, the brackish tang of jellied eels and the warmth of Japanese curry sauce to the oily herbs and spice of fried chicken takeaways’ (Rhys-Taylor 2017:9).

Rhys-Taylor demonstrates how sensory dimensions themselves play a powerful role in shaping sociality itself, class, culture and multiculturalism. A focus on the fine-grain detail of everyday life reveals far more about the city as a lived space than any amount of macro-spatial theorising. The politics of our multi-sensorial experiences are integral to an understanding of the distinctions of class and multi-culture, ethnicity, race and gender, social inclusion and feelings of belonging and exclusion, them and us.

Discussions of the synaesthetic sensuous engagement of people and place form a fundamental element of all the individual chapters that make up this book, from the descriptions of the places themselves to the discussions of the manner in which people dwell in and materially inhabit them.

Walking the city

Another powerful strand in the kind of research undertaken in this book is the humble act of walking to acquire knowledge of places through our limbs. All the field research undertaken in the various chapters has involved walking in between and out of places. Knowing the city through walking it, like phenomenology in general, and platial analysis in particular, has a long history in social research, going back to Baudelaire and the work of Benjamin and his meditative wanderings and reflections on urbanism in relation to mass consumption as an emerging new way of city life in the nineteenth century (Benjamin 1973, 1979).

Benjamin, somewhat in the same spirit as Aron’s conceptualisation of the apricot cocktail, was interested in exploring the city both from the small nuances and overlooked details of place, and the manner in which the past interpenetrates the present. For example, in *One Way Street*, he writes of the central obelisk in the Place de la Concorde in Paris.

What was carved in it four thousand years ago today stands at the centre of the greatest of city squares. Had that been foretold to him – what a triumph for the pharaoh! The foremost Western cultural empire will one day bear at its centre the memorial of his rule. How does this apotheosis appear in reality? Not one among the tens of
Benjamin’s perspective on the city stresses the relationship between the materiality of its built environment, personal and collective memories and the historical past. The stress is on the urban fabric as perceived, and in this respect he is close to de Certeau’s and Lefebvre’s notion of spaces of representation or perceived space (Lefebvre 1991).

Benjamin’s aphoristic portraits of Naples, Moscow, Marseilles and Paris stress the particularity of these cities, their constant ability to surprise, rather than their spatialised sameness. He was sensitive to their aurasitic qualities, involving the tactile sensing of the city through the body. He was interested in the everyday processes by which flesh and stone interact and through which knowledges of the city are gained and lost. We encounter in Benjamin the figure of the *flâneur* who moves:

... through space and among the people with a viscosity that both enables and privileges vision... The *flâneur* possesses a power, it walks at will, freely and seemingly without purpose, but simultaneously with an inquisitive wonder and an infinite capacity to absorb the activities of the collective – often formulated as ‘the crowd’. (Jenks 1995:146)

The *flâneur* acquires knowledge through being there, strolling, looking, feeling, touching, feeling, smelling. To be effective, the *flâneur* must dissolve into the crowd. He (and for Benjamin the *flâneur* was always male) is simultaneously visible and invisible. He dwells and participates within urban life as an observer, a witness of the unexpected. Wandering and losing himself in the city, he is most productive in his apparent indolence. He is a spectator of urban life. Restless and constantly wandering, he goes in search of the new experiences and spectacles the city throws up.

Walking has until recently been little discussed in either anthropology or urban sociology as a means of knowing and researching, but there is now a growing literature (Bates and Rhys-Taylor 2017; Chambers 1994; Chen 2016, *chapter 4*; Horowitz 2013; Ingold 2007; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Richardson 2015; Solnit 2002; Tilley 1994, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2012; Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017) forming another set of resources on which individual contributors draw in their accounts.

Walking is central to city life in London. It is perfectly aligned with a phenomenological position in which one takes one’s body into place...
and with sensory scholarship. In this respect, I have put forward the notion of the ‘phenomenological walk’. This is the walk of the walk.

It is a participatory understanding produced by taking one’s own body into places and landscapes and opening up one’s perceptual sensibilities and experience. Such a walk always needs to start from a bracketing off of mediated representations of landscapes and places. It is an attempt to learn by describing perceptual experiences as precisely as possible as they unfold during the course of the walk. As such it unfolds in the form of a story or narrative that needs to be written as one walks. Walking and writing become synonymous acts as language and knowing are synonymous. This is simply because the act of writing slows experience down and focuses attention… So one walks in order to be able to write and one writes in order to be able to walk. (Tilley 2012: 28)

Various contributors to this book write and walk in this general spirit. Through this process of research, perspectival experience arises both from the body and, in the city, from the active material agency of the built environment in relation to it and the other people, situations and events encountered along the way. Perception is intimately related to material presences and sensations that unfold in the passage of time. Walking becomes embodied in one’s being and ultimately allows a comparative understanding of places in the urban landscape. There is always sensory overload. One always has to select from it to make sense of anything, but there is no substitute for the sensing and sensed carnal body in place for which the recording technologies of vision and sound (none exist for tactile experience, bodily kinaesthetics, taste and smell) are always inadequate because of their very disembodiment. In the walk, the small intimate details of everyday life may be pieced together like so many bits of a jigsaw puzzle to provide the broader picture – the rough sleeper in the doorway of a fashionable shop, the lady carrying multiple bags, graffiti on the walls, the pollarded tree, the smell of the curry house, shop window decorations, Christmas tree lights in December, the sirens of the police car, the diesel hum of black cabs, the asphalt and the flagstones, the colour of the bricks, gleaming shafts of sunlight highlighting a tree.

Pulini’s account (chapter 1) of a central London street is derived from both sitting in it on a step and observing and walking it. Yates (chapter 3) takes us on a walk from Hounslow West underground station through suburban streets of semi-detached houses to enter the housing estate that is the focus of his analysis, and then leads us in and around the
Jeevendrampillai’s discussion of Surbiton (chapter 4) shows how the inhabitants make it their own through collective practices of walking. Tilley explores Holland Park through walking in and around it at different times of the day, on different days of the week, and during different seasons of the year (chapter 9).

Of course, there are other ways to experience the city: from the perspective of a bicycle (Cox 2015; Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017, chapter 7; Vivanco 2013), from a train or a bus or a car (Adams 2001; Thrift 2010), or from a skateboard (Borden 2003). Urry has explored the general theme of mobilities as experiential modes (Urry 2007). Experiencing the city on a boat provides another alternative experiential relationship. As Malko-georgou shows (chapter 5), a boater’s experience of the city from the water is entirely different from that of those who dwell on the fixity of the land. Living on a boat affords both relative social isolation and new kinds of transitory, yet at the same time repetitive, social bonds.

The rhythms of the city

Lefebvre puts forward another perspective for understanding the practices of everyday life: the analysis of rhythms and their intersection with the biological, psychological and social aspects of dwelling (Lefebvre 2004). The notion of rhythm is one that embraces a non-linear notion of time and repetitive practices. Rhythms always depend on repetitions materialised in the space-time of places in the city. They are linear and cyclical flows and tempos that are constitutive of life. They embrace the repetitive time of the body rather than chronometric time, a strong phenomenological theme, space-time as lived through the body.

The musical analogies that Lefebvre uses – melody, harmony, rhythm – are key to understanding this approach. Melody is a sequence of notes, harmony is these notes sounding sympathetically together, rhythm is about the placement of notes and their relative lengths. The human body has its internal corporeal rhythms, and each organ has its own rhythm but is part of a spatiotemporal whole. This body in the world is the site of interaction between the biological, physiological and the social (Lefebvre 2004:81).

Rhythms link time to space in a localised time or temporalised space. The rhythm analyst thinks through his or her body not in the abstract but in the lived time-space of the body. There is always a plurality of rhythms in social life that can thus be characterised as being polyrhythmic in character, composed of diverse rhythms (Lefebvre 2004:89). The sensing
and sensed body itself relates to a sensory world of rhythms, the odours of the morning and of the evening, the diurnal repetition of darkness and light, of rain and sunlight, and so on (Lefebvre 2004:21).

Looking out from a window at a junction of roads in Paris, Lefebvre discusses the multiple rhythmic characteristics of the street. These consist of the soundscape of rhythms of traffic starting and stopping at a traffic light, coupled with the stench of fumes, the flows of pedestrians walking up and down the street, the rhythms of shoppers flowing into and out of the street, in and around and among the cars at the junction, and the tourists who walk and explore the city at a different pace and time. There are the habitual repetitive rhythms of people going to and from work in the morning and the evening, of children going back and forth to school, the rhythms characterising the social life of the hours of the day and night, a weekday and a weekend, related to the repetitive passage of the seasons (Lefebvre 2004:19–26). Rhythms are thus always synaesthetic in character.

Lefebvre suggests one might best understand these rhythms from above, from the window looking down. A phenomenologist of rhythm would instead want to experience them in the street itself as part of the polyrhythmic flow. This is where rhythms are materialised in the interactions of people and things, in and through the built fabric of place: ‘the crowd is a body, the body is a crowd’ (Lefebvre 2004:42). The body is thus both singular and multiple. The biological rhythms of the body are linked to the day and the night and to the rhythms of capitalist production and consumption in the city.

The rhythms of the city arise from life itself, not just its immediacy but life in all of its thickness, in the multiple relations between the human and nonhuman, the corporeal and the inorganic, the phenomenal and the epiphenomenal, between the most banal and most intense of human experiences of the everyday. City rhythms orientate and direct the lives of those who dwell in them. Different places in the city have their own rhythmic intensities and order in relation to the governmentality and institutionalisation of city space, such as congestion zones and traffic rules, opening and closing times, restrictions on smell and noise, freedom of movement.

Lefebvre’s rhythmanalysis does not provide a methodology for studying the urban any more than Benjamin’s flâneurie does. Instead, it provides an orientational metaphor for understanding urban life in terms of rhythms and flows. Some of the general ideas have been taken up and developed in some recent urban studies (e.g. Chen 2016; Schlör 1998; Smith and Hetherington 2013).
Schlör (1998) discusses the night-time rhythms of Paris, Berlin and London between 1840 and 1930 and their link to the material technologies of lighting, policing, and changing normative moral codes in relation to state regulations, providing a rich set of interpretations that could be taken forward in a study of contemporary London in relation to, for example, attempts to further stimulate a night-time economy, the recent night-time running of parts of the underground system, and the relaxation of drinking hours.

Smith and Hall (2013) discuss the 24-hour city in relation to the night-time rhythms of contemporary Cardiff in relation to a range of urban patrols – those of street cleaners, the police and outreach social workers coping with the homeless – and through which street-level politics of place, time and movement are negotiated. This is a one-day snapshot of the city, and such an analysis could be considerably extended. As often as not, the rhythms of places within the city during the day are inverted during the night. They are thus composed of contrasting temporalities.

Revill (2013) links rhythm to the sonoric spaces of the railway station. Rhythms are not just about movement, they have their own repetitive soundscapes that effectively become part of the embodied relationship of people to railway terminals. One might also note here that all other kinds of sensory perceptions have their rhythmic patterns – rhythms of smell and taste, touch and visual perception.

Chen (2016) emphasises the materiality of rhythms of walking in east London: ‘the assemblage constructions of pedestrians, vehicles, wind, rubbish bins, a ticketing machine, a traffic island and stairways continually weave street rhythms… traffic lights, yellow lines, parking metres, road signs and zebra crossing’ (Chen 2016:75). Arranged sequentially and repetitively along the street, their materiality is in part constitutive of the rhythms of the feet and bodies along it, rhythmic agents in the process of walking. However, Chen’s account of east London is not that of its contemporary street rhythms but rather a more generalised ‘rhythmic’ cultural history of the walking of its inhabitants, generated by considering the representational discourses of texts and films.

A number of contributors to this book incorporate a discussion of rhythms in their accounts. Pulini (chapter 1) begins her contribution with a consideration of the social rhythms of a street. Rhythms of movement back and forth along the river and canal system of north-east London form a fundamental part of the experience of living on a houseboat in Malkogeorgou’s account (chapter 5). Rhythms are discussed in Tilley’s account of a park that socially self-segregates itself (chapter 9). They are the centre of analysis in Young’s account of a taxi rank (chapter 8).
Temporality and the storied character of place

An obvious connection can be made between the rhythms of place, a place’s embodied temporalities and stories of place. Young draws this out forcefully in his account of the storied temporal and historical characteristics of the Harrington Road taxi rank (chapter 8). Tilley (chapter 9) discusses the manner in which prestige, power and social distinction are reproduced in a London park over the longue durée.

Temporalities are part and parcel of place making and their construction as ‘other’ in relation to other places. Various cultural historical and biographical discussions and historical ethnographic accounts of cities in general and London in particular have explored the ordinary everyday life in the city in form of more embodied perspectives on the meaning and significance of place, emotions and the urban experience. Examples include Raban’s Soft City (Raban 1974), works by Ackroyd (2000), Sennett (1992, 2006, 2018) and Campkin (2013), Marcus’s apartment stories (Marcus 1999) and White’s social history of a tenement block in east London, the Rothschild Buildings (White 2003). Recently, such storied historical accounts of the city have been explicitly linked to methodological practices of walking in place in the city. Back (2017) incorporates stories of place in walking the streets in east London that also play a significant role in Rhys-Taylor’s account of the sensory dimensions of urban multi-culture (Rhys-Taylor 2017).

Places have their own temporalities, or their timed platial identities and meanings (Lynch 1972). This is not a simple matter of continuity and change in terms of an empty chronometric time of dates and events. Instead, the pasts of places can be considered to be, in important respects, coeval with their presents. The idea is that time is not uniform, a kind of universal measuring scale that is homogeneous and linear in character, but subjective and made up of different human temporalities: some short-, some medium-, and some very long-term indeed that intermingle and criss-cross. There is no present divorced from a past that is supposedly gone for ever.

The past is always a material presence, and we are always surrounded by things of the past that, in fact, are constitutive of our present. There are different ways in which we can conceive of the importance of cultural traditions and collective memories of the past. One form is the recall of traditions and memories that sit in the mind and is linked to individual and collective experiences of the past in the present. Another approach is to place emphasis on memories that sit in the body in the world – that is, they are embodied and do not require
acts of recollection (Casey 2000; Connerton 1989; Ricoeur 2004). The memories instead involve the manner in which bodies engage with the materiality of landscapes, places and things. Such bodily memories borne out of bodily experiences transcend time and directly link past and present through the medium of embodied interactions, producing an active habitual immanence mediating relationships between people and things and places.

The notion of time informing the individual chapters in this book is phenomenologically understood as temporality, the times of bodies, sensual relations and human experience. This time of the body and of intersubjective material relations is a time of the self and a time of others, a lived time and one of the multiple times of places. The temporality of social life, produced in concrete practices that actively produce space-time rather than taking place in space and in time, has been stressed by a number of anthropologists (Bourdieu 1977; Hirsch and Stewart 2005; Munn 1992; Tilley 2017). Time has thus been understood as fluid and in flux, and multiple rather than singular in character.

Bergson (1991) influentially stressed time as la durée or duration. The carnal human body exists in time; it fuses through its material being past, present and future, which interpenetrate each other. The body experiences a flux of sensations in time, linking matter to memory. How we understand the world therefore links matter to memory. Our understanding is embedded in the manner in which we encounter and remember the world through our embodied experience of it. Time is embodied through memories. These memories may either be consciously recalled or a product of inscribed corporeality and habit (Bergson 1991:81–2). Through the moving corporeal body, past and present interpenetrate each other and lead to the future. Both duration and simultaneity constitute the self. Through the body the present passes at the same time as it is present. The paradox is that the past becomes contemporary with, or is in the same time as, the present that it once was part of. Different times can coexist with each other; some are deep and are of a very long-term nature, others are much shallower and of shorter duration.

In the ordinary life of the street, the past has an active and performative immanence. Pulini (chapter 1) in her discussion shows, in relation to the social history of a street for over 100 years, that while radical changes have occurred in its social composition and use these are entangled with long-term continuities in the social characteristics of this place. One change was the early development of boarding houses, transforming individual family dwellings to those with multiple occupants.
A second was the overwhelmingly female social composition of the street, initially in terms of servants servicing the family dwellings, later in women who worked in the surrounding shops and service sectors. A third was the dominance of one-person households. These significantly structure an understanding of the street today. In Heideggerian terms, buildings are prerequisites for dwelling, and some of the dwellings in the street are effectively in the same time as the past but exist in the present. In other words, the street is characterised by multiple temporalities. It does not just exist in one time, in one place.

Communities

One recurrent theme that occurs in some of the accounts in both sections of the book concerns the question of communities in place and the manner in which they are realised in everyday life. This is one of the most difficult and fractured topics in the entire literature on urban culture. A large number of contemporary writers agree that old traditional notions of community have been significantly eroded, and sometimes have vanished entirely, in the modern city. This is the general theme of Augé’s notion of non-places, discussed above. For Bauman (2000), a new world has arisen characterised by fragile and ephemeral social relationships linked to migration and displacement, globalisation and transnational and cosmopolitan connections and senses of belonging enabled by the new communication media in the fabric of daily life. In an era of risk and uncertainty people no longer know who or what they are or how to live. Giddens links this theme to the evacuation of tradition in our ‘late modernity’ (Giddens 1994). Once we start asking identity questions with regard to who we are, how we should relate to others and how to live, we have lost all that was previously important in identity formation: tradition and the routinisation of that tradition in daily life. We increasingly live in an atomised ‘land of strangers’ in which care and concern for others has all but vanished (Amin 2012).

In relation to the city, Amin (2012) explores, conceptually at least, the manner in which ‘the many local separations, dispersed geographies of attachment and qualified proximities between strangers that characterise modern urban living make it difficult to build urban commons based on care for the other’ (Amin 2012:78). His solution is to systematically construct a politics of togetherness, making connections and dependencies between people visible and so hopefully revealing the value of a shared and functioning commons. But Amin’s
conceptualisation is not based on any first-hand evidence. It remains just an assertion.

Amin (2012) argues that to promote an ethics of the city (a theme also explored by Sennett 2018) we need to include consideration of the habituated experiences of the city, between prosaic usage of places and public articulation of what this adds to personal and collective life. This requires systematic proliferation of:

… the sites of shared living through which a dispersed sense of the plural communal can emerge... the associations, clubs, meeting places, friendship networks, workplaces and spaces of learning that fill cities, where habits of being with others and in a common space... take shape. They include the physical spaces – streets, retail spaces, libraries, parks, buildings, public services and collective institutions [and]... the city’s public sphere – symbolic, cultural discursive and political. (Amin 2012:79)

But all these somewhat utopian assertions that one can somehow socially engineer a new kind of city that enhances the social lives of its inhabitants should surely be predicated on a grounded in-depth knowledge of such places and whether they do indeed produce urban conviviality or instead, frequently, a contested landscape infused by a politics of exclusion, privilege and hierarchy (see chapter 9 of this book).

Combining Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and social field, Savage and colleagues have proposed a notion of ‘elective belonging’ to characterise neighbourhoods (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005). This is intended to resolve two poles in a consideration of urban communities mentioned above: roots and routes, stasis and mobility. They argue that residential place is chosen in relation to life trajectories of individuals. The fixity of place counterbalances global flows by providing ‘new kinds of solidarities among people who choose to live in particular places’ (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005:53). People moving into a neighbourhood both adopt it and adapt to it. Thus the ‘aura’ or ‘aesthetics’ of the place are more important than any traditional notion of community belonging and interaction between people. The neighbourhood can thus become an arena in which class distinctions can be marked, a form of symbolic capital in which patterns of inequality are materially marked out.

Butler has related this to changing residential patterns of the middle classes (Butler 2007), while Watt uses the term ‘selective belonging’ in both urban and suburban places to refer to more fine-grained distinctions within neighbourhoods (Watt 2010, 2011). The suburbs as much as the
inner city are increasingly becoming places of migratory flows, places in between characterised by multiple senses of belonging (Watt and Smets 2014).

The more general theme here is of communities and places as being process, rather than in terms of stable and enduring relationships between friends, family and neighbours, and places themselves as multiple and relational. Jones and Jackson describe the particular type of belonging where ‘people experience different places at different times or several places at once, as “cosmopolitan belonging”’ (Jones and Jackson 2014a:5). Again, what is missing in these considerations of what community might mean to the residents of the contemporary city is a consideration of the materiality of these symbolic practices and narratives, elective and selective belongings in place. They are primarily conceptualised as being a matter of mind rather than body, a fragmentary immaterial sharing of an imagined sense of belonging.

Blokland’s fine-grained ethnography of three adjacent areas of the Hillesluis neighbourhood in Rotterdam (Blokland 2003) provides, in contrast, an excellent ethnographic account of grounded research in an urban community in transition. Blokland begins her account with a fictional walk along the streets as they were in 1995 (Blokland 2003:28ff.), discussing their history, layout and the character of the built architecture, the gardens of some of the houses, whether they are dilapidated or renovated, and so on. The picture painted is of a wide variety of building styles and arrangements of public space. The focus is on community in relation to a distinct and bounded place in the built environment.

Following Hannerz (1980), Blokland discusses social roles in relation to age structure, and the life cycle and ethnicity in relation to public space. She then analyses personal networks, intimate bonds between family, friends, neighbours and colleagues, networks of social relations, community understood in terms of interpersonal relations and whether these are localised or extent far beyond the limits of the place as physically defined. Her focus then shifts to the manner in which people define themselves and others in terms of transactions, attachments and personal bonds – what community affiliations people have or do not have. Blokland notes that over time, from the 1920s, social changes in Hillesluis have led ‘less to the loss of communities than to privatisation in which familiarity in the neighbourhood progressively loses its significance… [It] no longer offers a framework for reference groups and social distinctions’ (Blokland 2003:89). Interdependencies between people become increasingly anonymous.
Four general patterns emerged in the way in which people understood themselves in relation to their neighbourhoods: people who associated no particular significance in relation to place; people who just used the neighbourhood for practical purposes; people who focused on symbolic neighbourhood use, largely elderly with an emotional involvement with the place mentioned in their stories; and those who associated living there with a particular lifestyle and patterns of consumption (Blokland 2003:157). The strongest local orientation was among peer groups, largely displacing the historical role of the family that had previously been all important:

... the shopping street, the community centre where they played bingo and the pavement in front of their doorsteps were the peer group’s socialising sites in the built environment. Since the peer group members considered visiting each other’s homes inappropriate they did much of their socialising on the street. The street thus became “their” street and the square “their square”... Embedded rituals had evolved at the locations where they experienced events together. The built environment reminded them of these events. (Blokland 2003:159)

Place and locality were extremely significant to them and were expressed in terms of distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Blokland (2003) suggests that the community she studied was characterised both by binding and divisive attitudes (Blokland 2003:86). These were related to politics, clashes of religious values and practices (Protestants versus Catholics), and ethnicity in relation to a recent influx of immigrants from Turkey, Surinam and Morocco. In the new politics of place, the white Dutch minority (constituting now only a third of the population) still dominated culturally, drawing on the past and a nostalgic and selective remembering of that past to assert their own identity and rights to the place. In the words of one of her informants: ‘we established Hillesluisians who have lived here our whole lives and the rightful owners of this neighbourhood, had a better time together when it was just us here. You newcomers... couldn’t possibly have known how cosy it was here’ (Blokland 2003:199; emphasis in original).

Blokland’s general conclusions are that community today is to be best understood as a form of social imagination that is realised in urban practices producing shared symbolic practices and narratives: “they exist as impressions of thinking and feeling that “we belong together” and as everyday social practices in which we express with whom we belong...”
and where we include others with “us”, or in fact exclude them from “us” (Blokland 2003:209). What community may be supposed to be can be interpreted in any number of different ways by the individuals involved.

Imagined communities and relational belonging

Exploring the way communities imagine themselves further, in a later book Blokland argues that in the contemporary city human affiliations are made up by a complex web of ties – social networks, durable engagements, fluid encounters, bonds, attachments and interdependencies. These create ‘relational settings of belonging’ between people (Blokland 2017:86). Sociologically, a connection between community and place does not have to be made any more. She examines this in terms of poles of a continuum between public and private, anonymous and intimate relations (Blokland 2017:89). Practices of belonging do not necessarily involve any community, nor may such belonging contribute to it: ‘community is not local; community is not a matter of personal networks either; and we can experience belonging on very many scales’ (Blokland 2017:165). Community has then vanished in this account to be replaced by a sense of belonging that may be experienced to a greater or lesser degree by different individuals and who they identify with and the manner in which they think they belong. Essentially, this is a matter of choice, a personal option. In symbolic practices of belonging, communities become imagined entities. It should be noted that Blokland’s later book is not based on any ethnography, but is rather theorised in relation to recent sociological literature, an imagining of what the real might be like for people and groups. Her new ‘informants’ with regard to community and place in the city are not people, but the writings and representations of other urban sociologists.

It is notable, in this respect, that the surviving multicultural inhabitants of the Grenfell Tower disaster in west London clearly felt a very strong sense of identification and place attachment to a specific place and locality, so much so that most still remained in temporary or hotel accommodation a year later because they did not wish to be rehoused in another place and area of the city. One of Blokland’s informants in Hillesluis told her ‘everybody has to live somewhere’ (Blokland 2003:58). For those living in the tower, it was their home and that was precisely why the fire was so devastating and traumatic. The fire not only wiped away lives but destroyed homes and the personal and social memories connected with the material things with which these
people lived out their lives. The inhabitants of Grenfell Tower did not conceive of themselves of living in an anonymous world of global flows and diffuse fluid urban belongings, decentred from place. They did not think that they were living among Amin’s land of strangers, but still in terms of family, friends and neighbours. Are we to suggest that they are deluded? Have they no understanding, or a false consciousness of their own lives? There appears to be a systematic mismatch between many academic accounts of what urban communities have become today and how ordinary people think.

The protests following the fire, outside the town hall, and subsequently, essentially involved the objectification of identity politics in the face of adversity. This brought out a positive evaluation and sense of community, of living together in a neighbourhood, that was normally lived through their bodily routines and everyday practices rather than verbally expressed. It involved an attachment to others that they felt were like themselves. The protestors in opposition to a right-wing Conservative council and its neo-liberal policies of outsourcing and privatisation were firstly saying that those who died did so because they were poor, but also that those who survived had nothing more than the clothes they stood up in. In the immediate aftermath of the fire, volunteers amassed a huge assemblage of things for redistribution. This was not just about a functional need for things. It was rather an expression of the comfort the things themselves would provide as people began to rebuild their lives.

Constructing place and community

Place identities are always fragile. They require active production and reproduction through continuous situated social acts that produce subjects and moralities. Places are not given and static but in the process of being and becoming. Neighbourhoods are contexts for the production of local subjects: ‘existing places and spaces, within a historically produced spatiotemporal neighbourhood and with a series of localised rituals, social categories, expert practitioners, and informed audiences, are required in order for new members... to be made temporary or permanent subjects’ (Appadurai 1996:185).

It was to the London suburbs that the middle classes increasingly moved post World War 1, and, following that, back into the inner city from the 1960s, resulting in its gentrification. The suburbs were a product of both planning and speculation linked to the extension of transport systems, principally the underground in the north of the city. The suburbs
promised and were represented as a kind of pastoral and rural ideal, allowing both easy access to and escape from the inner city to live in a calm green and leafy place (see Matless 1998:32ff. for an excellent historical discussion of this and the sexualised ‘hermaphrodite’ qualities of suburbia).

In his account of Surbiton in chapter 4, Jeevendrampillai explodes the standard representational myth of the suburb as a place that is boring, conservative and conformist in terms of the manner in which people live their lives, coupled with the uniformity of their dwellings and lifestyles, the ‘desperate housewives’ territory of the media, film and some academic writing. The suburbs as represented become endless and relentless plots of houses, each an individual dream, but each the same as the others. Relph, for example, tells us that the office blocks of the inner city are:

… reoccupied daily by armies of clone-like organisation men and women, issuing from the suburban blandscape wherein lives a race of uniformly bland suburbanites, striving to indulge their materialist tendencies in the latest model of a video-recorder, a package tour to Spain, or, at the very least, in the ineffable sameness of the umpteen-billioneth hamburger. (Relph 1981:13)

The suburban dweller in this account is essentially a clone living in a uniform flat-scape with no sense of belonging. This fear and critique of a homogenised world has haunted much urban thought. But when we talk to people and observe their place-making activities, an entirely different picture emerges. The suburbs when we examine them closely enough prove to be every bit as vibrant and architecturally differentiated as the inner city, each with its own character and sense of place.

The public ritualisation and objectification of identities in the form of public parades, spectacles, performances and practices is a common theme in the anthropological literature on place. People reveal themselves to themselves and rethink themselves in the process (e.g. Cohen 2013; Guss 2000).

Jeevendrampillai discusses the manner in which local people celebrate their relationship to the south London suburb of Surbiton through rituals and parades of urban identity construction in a celebration of the distinctiveness of this place drawing on and reinterpreting the historical past in the process. The material sensuousness of the suburbs offers a rich set of stories for the construction of place. These invert the myth of the soulless suburb lacking in any real identity of its own and
equivalent to any other. The ‘Seethingers’ of Surbiton actively rework symbols and histories of place into new stories and materialise these stories in events and parades to construct a vibrant sense of place and neighbourhood through which community identity and meaning are created. Humour and irony, entirely overlooked in urban studies, are part of this. This form of the active creation of suburbia is by no means uncommon or unusual in London. For example, the inhabitants of Walthamstow and South Norwood perform similar work in the construction of their suburbs (see their ‘unofficial tourist boards’: http://www.walthamstowtourism.co.uk and https://southnorwoodtouristboard.com).

Households and streets

Miller has argued in relation to the biographies of the inhabitants of the south London street that he studied with regard to their home possessions (Miller 2009) that the street was essentially a series of unrelated households, so a focus on the individual was the only way to understand the lives of its householders. This work arose from a dissatisfaction with the manner in which the social sciences try to treat people as ‘representative’ tokens of broader social categories in terms of their gender, ethnicity, nationality and social class. Instead, Miller writes that:

These households were radically unconnected with either community or neighbourhood. But, apart from some older isolated males, there was no particular sense of alienation or anomie; both presupposed by holistic traditions of social analysis as conditions which follow in the absence of these wider relationships of belonging. (Miller 2009:7)

Miller adds that the inhabitants of the street did not identify either with living in London or the UK. Only 23 per cent of the inhabitants of the 100 households studied were born in London. Many households consisted of people from entirely different backgrounds and nationalities; community did not exist. However, what Miller has missed out and did not consider was the materiality of the street itself and its location in a neighbourhood and how this can be part of an embodied construction of identity and community that becomes habituated, leading to a feeling of being at home, something that by its very nature is not usually verbally expressed.

Pulini (chapter 1) argues that you do not need to know someone’s name or talk to them in the street or attend community meetings to
establish a sense of a shared identity in place. The whole process is far more subtle than that. It involves the repetitions and rhythms of life as lived, recognising the faces of others that live in the street, the material characteristics of the house doors, the multiple door bells of the flats on the outside, the metal railings and the basements, the birch trees on the street corner, regularly visiting the shops in the neighbourhood in the provisioning of the household, a shared soundscape and smell-scape, looking out from the windows of your flat and seeing sisters performing pedicure on the balcony opposite, the changing diurnal cycles of light and shade and darkness and the manner in which the rhythms of daily life change at the end of the working week. All these and other materialised realities create a sense of social being and belonging to place. People's relationships to their streets are materially grounded in these ways and they are not part of some grand scheme or design. They arise from life itself.

The street discussed by Pulini (chapter 1) in the London Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is well within a 10-minute walking distance of Kensington Palace. This is an area of London that has the most desirable postcode (W8). It is consistently characterised in the sociological literature on class as being the heartland ‘territory’ of the super-rich (Savage et al. 2015; Webber and Burrows 2015), who have glitzy and glamorous lifestyles, spending money like water. This is the cliché image of the place that occurs over and over again in texts and is derived from the aggregate social statistics and consumer survey data. Compared with the poorer neighbourhoods of east London that have been extensively studied over a 30-year period (Butler and Hamnett 2011), this area of the city has been ignored by social researchers until very recently. Elite areas of the city were apparently not worth studying, as their social composition could more or less be taken for granted.

Pulini’s detailed examination of the residential structure of the street, undertaken on the ground, reveals a far more complex pattern of residential use in which some of those who dwell there are living on or just above the minimum wage in small barely furnished single rooms and using communal toilets and washing facilities.

**Writing the city**

Phenomenological accounts, based as they are on participatory lived experience among people, inevitably result in a representation in text. The accounts try to say the unsaid, pick up on the habitual routinised relations of people to place and to the materiality of the urban world, the
manner in which people in their daily lives relate to the affordances and constraints of urban life. The ‘deep hanging out’ (Geertz 2000:107) of participant observation needs to be realised in the form of richly nuanced description. Inadequate as our language remains, we must attempt to put into words the city as felt, a structure of feeling and emotion, delight and disgust, fear and loathing, contest and conflict, or a sense of well-being and relative harmony. This means exploring the tropic or metaphoric character of language to communicate meaning, rather than a dull or deadened literalism (Gibbs 1994; Lakoff and Johnson 1990; Tilley 1999) to link, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, the flesh of our bodies to the flesh of the world (Merleau-Ponty 1968:142). This is the manner in which we both touch and are simultaneously touched by the things around us – touched by the feel of things, the sight of things, their smell and taste, their sounds, their surfaces, colours and textures and through the kinaesthetic of our bodies – that are always in place.

The language used thus flows from an embodied relation to place. In the bulk of academic literature, it is quite striking how disembodied written landscapes and places become as textual representations. This is in part because much that is written about the city is not only written on paper, it is principally derived from paper, from maps, paintings, archives, texts or alternatively from highly structured and framed representations of photographic images and in film. All the individual authors in this book make a return to the real an essential part of their studies – places as lived, rather than representations of them.

There has been a long tradition of writing and representing the city in a more evocative manner. There is much to be learned here from the literary styles of novelists and journalists and their representations of place in text. The surrealists and situationists attempted to grasp the city through various non-conventional mappings, artistic and poetic attempts to evoke and rethink the urban (McDonough 2009) leading on to more recent attempts to produce psychogeographies of emotions, thought and feeling (Coverley 2006; Richardson 2015; Self 2007; Sinclair 2003a, 2003b, 2009).

Sinclair’s best writings are about Hackney (2009), where he has himself lived and walked since 1968. He provides a vivid and, in many ways, extraordinary perspective on the borough, written and researched for over a decade. The book is part fact, part fiction, part memory work by himself and those he talked to. The central theme is the story of Sinclair’s life in Hackney from the late 1960s, combining observations, events, personal reminiscences and taped interviews. He talks and listens to local radicals and gentrifiers, elderly Jews, ex-ravers and previous residents.
who have moved away, among others. From the stories of others and his own personal involvement – from living in a communal house, to labouring jobs, to dealing in secondhand books, to becoming a popular author – he creates an alternative fragmented and engaging social history of place, charting its pubs, street markets, petty crime, schools, supermarkets, barber’s shops, bus routes and much more. Sinclair is a master of observational detail, which is evocatively written:

The supermarket had a space platform glow. WE’RE open 24 HOURS: a thorium luminescence... Malformed pigeons, feathers the colour of sodden bog paper, mobbed the spiked TESCO sign, scratching their parasites on anti bird spikes. The canted roof was slick with droppings. Everybody parked here, it was free and the rest of Hackney was impossible, residents only: patrolled, taxed, clamped, dragged away, crushed. Tesco tried barriers, but these were rammed, dismantled. They tried uniformed patrols, but that only stepped up paranoid levels... The crunching of metal, shivering of glass. Alarms trilling at disputed parking bays... A bright place in the Hackney night of blind walkers who decorate privet hedges with cans of Foster’s and Red Bull. White plastic forks and spoons like the regurgitated bones of extinct fish. (Sinclair 2009:237–8)

Part of the narrative involves Hackney’s transformation from decaying neighbourhood in industrial decline to its current gentrifying state. If you want to learn about Hackney through Sinclair’s eyes and in terms of his social networks, this is an extraordinary book. Sinclair’s accounts and discussions are personalised and perhaps ultimately, one might suggest, narcissistic narratives. They frequently resonate with a nostalgia for the traces of a lost past in the contemporary city (see Bonnett 2009 for a discussion of this). This is also a prevalent theme in other writings about material and social change concerned with the gentrification of places and neighbourhoods (see, e.g., Jacobs 1961 and discussions in Zukin 2010). On the other hand, the book is a major contribution to the understanding of this place. Place matters to Sinclair, and his knowledge of the place is through his involvement in it, living it, breathing its air, smelling its vapours.

A gap between words and things, people and texts can in fact only be bridged by the poetic and evocative use of language, involving what Geertz refers to as the ‘thick description’ of the ethnographic text (Geertz 1973). Such descriptions aim to clarify, illuminate and through their inevitably selective nature (no descriptions can ever be exhaustive) perform a process
of conceptual analysis. Arising from the real, they inevitably re-describe it from a point of view, an orientation, an intervention.

This book consists of a series of platial stories and material accounts of London. The contributions deliberately do not start with a theory to apply, a methodology to be followed, or a series of research objectives to be fulfilled, with answers provided in the conclusions, in the standard academic mode. This entire apparatus puts research into a straitjacket, moulding its contours and dooming its interpretative creativity and veracity from the outset.

The contributors start their accounts instead by describing the particular place under discussion, asking a deceptively simple question: what kind of place is this? The answers provided are as varied as the places described. These introductory descriptions of place have the purpose of attempting to evoke something of their character, ‘aura’ and feel in text. Above all, what is being emphasised in these accounts is the sensuous materiality of these places, whether it be the concrete A-frame structure of the Brunswick Centre, a hotel and a taxi rank on the Harrington Road, the green and wooded space of Holland Park, the interior and exterior spaces of Smithfield and Bermondsey markets, or graffiti and street art in Shoreditch. This is another way of telling, going against the grain of standard academic accounts.

To take one example from the book, Wilson’s evocative account of Smithfield meat market (chapter 6) begins with the manner in which the carcass of a lamb is expertly cut in three minutes. She describes the relationship between knife and bone and wooden cutting board, the visceral sound of the work, and the embodied movements of the cutters, who do not need to think about what they do. She then describes the crumbling structure of the market itself, its buildings and its incongruous juxtaposition in relation to the surrounding fabric of the built environment. It is a market of the night, characterised by whiteness and the harshness of fluorescent light, a bitter coldness, the constant hum of the refrigeration units, a raucous chorus of lorries and vans, trolleys, thuds of cleavers on meat and bone, the all-pervading smell of flesh and blood and offal. Still and silent during the day, when the surrounding commercial buildings come alive, it inverts the normal rhythms of urban life.

Structure of the book and scales of analysis

The particular places in London discussed are shown in Figure 0.1.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part considers the domestic and residential social sphere at different scales of analysis.
Fig. 0.1 Map showing the places in London discussed in the text. Source: author
Taking a London street as a place for study is exemplified by Miller’s anthropological studies of shopping for things to provision home and household (Miller 1998b) and of the manner in which people objectify their identities, memories and social relationships in their homes in relation to material things, revealing the significance of material forms for understanding the manner in which ordinary people construct through the medium of the things themselves meaning and significance for their lives (Miller 2008). Pulini (chapter 1) considers one residential street in west central London consisting of brick-built, late nineteenth-century terraced family houses that have subsequently been converted into flats and altered and haphazardly extended beyond recognition of the original architectural scheme at the back.

Melhuish (chapter 2) considers the modernist and ‘brutalist’ architecture of the Brunswick Centre, also in central London – a huge tiered concrete and glass structure consisting of streets in the sky subdivided into 600 flats dating back to the 1970s, originally designed to provide social housing.

Yates (chapter 3) discusses another social housing estate, in Hounslow on the western suburban periphery of the city, built of prefabricated concrete blocks and also completed in the early 1970s, but radically different in plan and design, consisting of low-rise grey buildings subdivided into flats, with walkways on the upper levels and flats with small gardens on the ground floor. The central theme here is social isolation and the effects that are created by this isolation, although ironically the estate is situated right next to the global hub of Heathrow Airport.

Jeevendrampillai’s paper (chapter 4) discusses Surbiton, another suburb, but in south London.

In these studies, we move from place considered at the level of a single street to increasingly larger scales of platial analysis. All these studies consider the manner in which the material fabric of these very different architectural places becomes embodied in quite distinct ways as part of everyday life. In the suburbs of Hounslow and Surbiton, the experience of the city and its places and the affordances and experiences it offers are of a very different character to those of the people who live in the city’s centre.

Malkogeorgou’s study (chapter 5), by contrast, concerns itself with the everyday life of people who live on the water rather than the land, in a floating ‘linear village’ of houseboats, each moored for two weeks and then moving from one place to another along the canal and river systems of north-east London. The inhabitants of these boats, people who are
always on the move, have a very different platial relationship, both to the city itself and to where they temporarily live. Their essentially migrational relationship to the city, quite literally going with the flow, contrasts in significant ways to the relationship to the city of those whose identities are fixed on the land.

All the chapters in part I explore relations between local communities and the places discussed above. The chapters in part II of the book consider a variety of different kinds of places in the public sphere: markets, a park, a taxi rank and gentrified streets replete with graffiti and street art. These places in the city are discussed below.

Markets

Markets form the focus of the chapters by Wilson and Yates in part II of the book. Wilson (chapter 6) and Yates (chapter 7) discuss two very different kinds of meeting place, both markets in the centre of the city: Smithfield Meat Market and Bermondsey Antiques Market. London is well known for both the diversity and ubiquity of its markets, from general street markets to those with specialised commercial niches. Both the markets considered are specialist in character: London’s largest wholesale meat market, and Bermondsey, one of the principal antiques markets of the city. Both are currently under threat and operate under the spectre of redevelopment. They have become in different ways sites of resistance related to their own histories.

The dominant perspective on markets in the literature is rather narrow, and markets are routinely regarded as primarily economic institutions. Discussions are usually related to a distinction between the physical marketplace itself, where goods are bought and sold, and market principles of supply and demand (Applbaum 2005). Markets have become today increasingly networked in the form of global commodity chains or the links through which a product passes and the manner in which it is fabricated, distributed and marketed along the way, between sites of production and consumption. Mintz (1986) and Roseberry (1996) provide excellent case studies. Markets have become more broadly conceptualised in terms of transnational ‘ethnoscapes’, ‘technoscapes’, ‘finanscapes’, ‘mediascapes’, ‘ideoscapes’ and transnational trade flows (Appadurai 1996). In this perspective, place becomes of little interest and all the emphasis is put on the fluidity of exchange.

These are not the kinds of general issues discussed by Wilson and Yates. They instead follow an alternative anthropological and ethnographic perspective in understanding markets as distinct places linked
to the identities and practices of those who trade in these markets and those who use them, social relationships among and between market traders and customers, and histories of markets in particular places (see Bestor 2004; Geertz 1979; Mayol 1998:107ff.; Richardson 2003; Rhys-Taylor 2013; Stoller 1997, chapter 5; Watson and Studdert 2006). The issues of interest here go beyond these social relationships to the material characteristics of what is being sold and how this impacts on those who work in and visit the markets. This involves the physical infrastructure of the marketplace itself, its relationship to the surrounding area, the manner in which goods are displayed and presented to give them their own aura or material aesthetic, the character of the market stalls and shops themselves and the spaces in between them, and the sensory environment of the market.

Bestor’s analysis of Tsukiji, the world’s largest fish market, exemplifies this alternative perspective well. He discusses Tsukiji as a focal point for global commodity chains and as a central node in global seafood, but more importantly in terms of social and material relationships (Bestor 2004). This involves consideration of Tsukiji’s complex social institutions, the everyday reproduction of Japanese cultural practices within it, the relationship of the market to the city and in terms of its sensuous qualities, the sights and sounds and smells, tastes and textures of the market itself in which fish are transformed into food and meanings created. Bestor’s rich discussion of the market is punctuated with details such as these.

Eels wriggle in plastic buckets; a flotilla of sea bass stare bleakly from their tank; live shrimps and crabs kick tiny showers of sawdust onto stall floors; mussels and clams spill across wide trays as if the tide had just exposed them; tubs of salted fish roe glitter. (Bestor 2004:10)

Merchandise spills out from the tiny stalls into the aisles... Passage is difficult and a leisurely stroll impossible. Buyers lugging square wicker baskets may temporarily block an aisle while they make a purchase, but they are politely yet impatiently pushed aside by other buyers... An old woman with a rectangular bamboo basket slung across her bent back selects miniscule amounts of shrimps, octopus, mackerel and tuna for her tiny retail shop on a backstreet downtown residential neighbourhood. (Bestor 2004:81)

This study of the fish market from the bottom up significantly contributes to an understanding of both Tokyo and the global fish trade from such
material details and discussions of the social identities of those who work in this place, in a manner that more abstracted top-down discussions fail to do. From the prism of a microcosm of the market, we can better reflect on the macro-economics of the global market for fish and understand it better in the process.

Favero’s account of the competing sensuous cacophony of the Japath street market in central New Delhi, its traders, customers, tourists and visitors, similarly approaches general issues of globalisation, place and identity. The starting point is a layered phenomenological description of the material and sensory characteristics of the place. The market, as depicted, is pastiche. It now apparently lacks any cultural distinctiveness or local or national authenticity. As a result of commercialism and deterritorialisation, it thus becomes a kind of ‘non-place’ in that respect. However, Favero explains that contrary to what might be thought:

In a market where global and local, tradition and modernity, past and present merge and blur the boundaries that separate them, is an arena for understanding the importance of imagination in everyday life. It offers a window on India’s active production of imaginings about the ‘West’ in relation to its own history. (Favero 2003:574)

Wilson, in this volume (chapter 6), discusses issues of identity politics in relation to the male, predominantly white working-class social environment of the Smithfield Meat Market in central London. The market workers are people who cannot afford to live in the city but migrate to their place of work during the night. Wilson discusses how those who work in the market conceptualise themselves in opposition to their surroundings, the authority of the City of London and its regulatory activities, to people who do not eat meat, and to the real and imagined history of the market itself as a place and in its connections with slaughtering and burnings and executions, industries and activities that historically could not take place within the perimeter of the old city walls.

Strong bonds occur between those who work in Smithfield Meat Market. The workers conceive of themselves as a social body with a shared identity or fictive kinship transcending family ties, in which the market is their primary home, with their tools extensions of their bodies. Wilson shows how body, work and the building are co-constitutive of the social body of the market workers. The market workers are initiated into the place, married to it in arcane ceremonies of place that are pervaded
by a sense of the carnivalesque and mockery, combining disorder and violence, comedy and humour.

Yates’s account of the Bermondsey Antiques Market (chapter 7) shows how the market actively constructs the meanings of the things themselves in the context of a particular institutional framework. Selling antiques is understood in terms of a social network whose primary characteristic involves the active selection and representation of both people and things as having value within the particular market context itself. The place – the market – co-presences things of value in relation to valued persons.

Anthropological studies of value show over and over again how value is a relative concept, defined and redefined by local communities, each having its own cosmology and type of value. Things considered valuable in one context may have little or no value for people in another (e.g. Appadurai 1986; Graeber 2001; Gregory 1982; Munn 1986). Most things of value to people today, in a market economy, in their everyday lives, are valuable precisely because they have no price – they are too valuable to be priced, and wealth and notions of what is of value are conceptually separated. This is because most cultural values are drawn from social relationships and personal experiences, notions of what makes a good life, and not from general economistic mental abstractions in which value is to be solely understood in terms of the kind of value created by exchange. Value instead relates to sentiment, thought and feeling, constituted relationally through living and experiencing the world with others. Value relates to the biographies of people and the biographies of things that are always entangled (Hoskins 1998, 2006; Kopytoff 1986). The production of commodities is part of a cultural process; they are marked as being a certain kind of thing in relation to social networks that create value in distinctive ways through systems of classification and practical taxonomies. Bestor’s study of the Tsukiji fish market exemplifies this point forcefully (Bestor 2004). Things, like people, have life trajectories relating to their production, exchange, consumption, discard use and reuse. Rubbish can be turned into a valuable thing overnight.

Yates discusses this selective and biographical construction of value in the context of the antique market in relation to the selection of the traders in it and the relationship between the traders themselves and the things that they value and sell. Regular buyers purchase antiques in the market because of the people there rather than the goods themselves. Relationships of trust are fundamental to this; people buy from people, and the things themselves are intermediaries in this social relationship that acquire value as part of this process.
A taxi rank

Young (chapter 8) discusses a completely different kind of public place – a taxi rank on the Harrington Road in central London. He shows how the flows of people and vehicles become an integral part of the character of this place, which has its own rhythmical sensory characteristics and differing diurnal rhythms of movement and flow and pause. Young discusses the manner in which these flows are intimately related to much broader socio-economic and political issues. One of these is the increasing use of digital technologies and the increasingly fraught and conflictual relationship between officially sanctioned and regulated black-cab taxi drivers and those driving Uber taxis. Another is a sense of an erosion of community, the loss of a way of life and conviviality among cab drivers supporting each other so that they can collectively make a living. This change extends to affecting the cab drivers’ pride in what they do – the erosion of the significance of their three-year training and of their encyclopaedic knowledge of the city streets and the best routes to follow according to the day of the week and the time of day, made increasingly redundant by satellite navigation technologies.

The life and community of black-cab drivers is threatened by fragmentation, new technologies, a breakdown in regulation and cutthroat unwelcome competition undercutting wages. Following Lefebvre’s consistent linkage of rhythms to the politics of identity, Young connects the issues to wider features of capitalism and the manner in which these are the politics of place on the Harrington Road. The Uber app, technology itself, erodes the significance of the taxi rank, for it is possible to call for a taxi anywhere and everywhere in the city without even needing the simple ritual of raising a hand. Young discusses how in reality both black-cab and Uber drivers share a similar predicament, both struggling with a precarious way of life and low wages. They are both part of a neoliberal political economy, replacing specialist by unqualified labour, and institutionalising distinctions between the working classes, splintering them and creating competition between similar socio-economic groups, providing a distraction from the injustices that capitalism itself creates.

Parks

London is famous for its parks, garden squares and green spaces. It is now being marketed and rebranded not as a city with parks but as a city within a park. The Ordnance Survey (the mapping agency of the UK) published, in October 2017, a new map showing over 3,000 parks, woodlands,
playing fields, woodlands, city farms, rivers and canals, as part of the launch of National Park City, which aims to re-frame London ‘as a connected and natural landscape’ (see https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/blog/2017/10/beautiful-new-map-london-created-celebrate-outdoors). Such a green city will encourage tourists and foreign investors and make Londoners care for and appreciate their city and encourage norms of public civility.

Parks have long been regarded as ameliorating city life, the green lungs of the city. Victoria Park in Hackney was the first purpose-built public park, opened in 1845 and created as a project aimed at morally uplifting the working poor of London’s East End. Public parks in the city have since been regarded as meeting places for different social classes and ethnicities to interact or at the very least be co-present in the same place. In the city, parks provide major sites for childhood socialisation. Almost every child has fond memories of being taken to a park and playing in a park, and almost all parks have their playgrounds. They are places to meet other people, to picnic, to relax and stroll, and learn about ‘nature’ and horticulture. Most, apart from those in central inner London, are used almost entirely by local communities and play an important role in establishing and maintaining social bonds between those who live in their vicinity. Some, like Holland Park, discussed by Tilley (chapter 9) have now become informal cemeteries for remembering the dead, with their numerous inscribed benches and signs beneath trees. They provide an entirely different sensory environment in the city, and with their cafes and bandstands and concerts are places of entertainment. These large open green spaces are of fundamental significance for dog walkers, for health and well-being (green therapy) and for keeping fit in the city. Besides these positive aspects, they may also be places to be feared and avoided by different ethnic and marginalised groups and by others, especially women, during the night and sometimes in daylight (see Branson (1978) for a personal account of some north London parks, and Elborough (2016) for a recent popular history). It is hard to overestimate the significance of parks as prisms for understanding everyday life.

Yet despite these detailed studies of urban parks, investigations of these and other issues are surprisingly rare in the academic literature, and studies of the material culture of parks are virtually non-existent. The anthropological study by Low, Taplin and Scheld of five parks in the USA (Low, Taplin and Scheld 2005) is an exception. These studies were commissioned by park management or government agencies aiming to understand the needs of users and how proposed changes to the park environment might impact on them, including in relation to
local democratic changes. This is very much applied research and does not go into any detail about the sensuous character of parks as places or their social and cultural meanings. The same is true of three British studies: Greenhalgh and Worpole (1996), Holland et al. (2007) and House of Commons (2017). The main issue explored is how parks can contribute to democratic values and promote social inclusion, dominated as they are by hegemonic white middle class values in their management and maintenance, even in multicultural neighbourhoods (Low, Taplin and Scheld 2005:16). Other studies of parks are almost exclusively concerned with the psychological benefits of green space in the city (see, e.g., Beck 2016; Carrus et al. 2014; Taylor and Kuo 2009).

Tilley’s analysis is of Holland Park in west central London. This, like Pulini’s street, is in ‘alpha-rich’ territory, except that here there are no shabby houses in its vicinity. Holland Park is surrounded by luxurious mansions, smaller houses and flats that retail for staggering prices. Their proximity to the park substantially boosts their market value in an area of London with the highest population density and the least green space.

The chapter explores Holland Park from a materialist phenomenological perspective, in terms of its social rhythms and conflicts with regard to who and what it is for, and what it should become in relation to London: a park for locals or a tourist destination, a park for peace and relaxation or a place for public entertainment, a place in which people should be allowed to go anywhere they like or a place for nature conservation in which public access to large areas is restricted. The contested character of the park goes far beyond these general issues. It also concerns rights to use the park and its governance and how people should use it and be regulated and controlled by disciplinary means. This involves different user groups: joggers and fitness trainers, dog walkers, cyclists, sports enthusiasts, people with horticultural and botanical interests, mothers and children, the frail and the elderly.

The chapter explores the social rhythms of the park in relation to times of the day and days of the week, the ebbs and flows of people into and out of it, and the way it becomes transformed from being an essentially white park used predominantly by locals during weekdays to a multicultural meeting place at the weekends, predominantly used by ‘outsiders’, when many locals absent themselves because they no longer feel it is their place. In this manner, the park subtly and silently becomes a socially segregated place, primarily maintained for, and enjoyed by, a social elite.
Gentrification on the streets

Sociological and geographical studies of gentrification in general, and in London in particular, have proliferated over the last 30 years (Bridge, Butler and Lees 2012; Butler 1997; Butler and Lees 2006; Hamnett 2003b; Hamnett and Williams 1979; Jackson and Butler 2015; Lees, Slater and Wyly 2010; Slater 2011). Gentrification has generally been understood as the colonisation and transformation of the inner city by affluent middle-class professional groups that more or less takes the same form everywhere, leading to the devastating displacement of working-class communities from home and neighbourhood. This is related to the shift from production to consumption and new forms of urban living involving a reinvestment in fixed capital. The brute social realities of displacement, the material inequalities and social injustice involved, are often disguised by referring to the regeneration and rejuvenation of these places in the city.

It is now understood in the growing literature on this topic that initial gentrification may lead, over time, to a new form of super-gentrification of neighbourhoods in which locality plays a crucial role (Butler and Lees 2006). High-middle-class professionals, particularly those working in the financial sector, are now displacing the initial gentrifiers, creating new ghettos of wealth and privilege. This argument is supported by census data, information about household income and occupation, and house price data.

However, despite the fact that processes of gentrification substantively alter the material character of the built environment of the neighbourhood, of homes and domestic interiors, and patterns of household consumption, these key material characteristics have been largely overlooked in the literature. It is, apparently, enough to spot the presence of a vegetarian restaurant or the presence of a gastropub on a shopping street to confirm gentrification has materially taken place. This dematerialised approach has obvious difficulty coping with either the material or social specificity of gentrification, because they are interlinked processes that are always geographically specific and linked to different places in the city.

Gentrification scholars have been more recently interested in trying to distinguish between the different styles, types and forms of gentrification in different areas of the city (e.g. fully gentrified, socially mixed but gentrifying, gated community, suburban, exurban (Jones and Jackson 2014b; Jackson and Butler 2015), or initial gentrification and subsequent super-gentrification (Butler and Lees 2006). Studies have...
continued to distinguish gentrification only in terms of a very broad social optic in which the everyday lives of the gentrifiers are not considered in any detail. In order to produce a more fine-grained, nuanced and textured perspective on the relationship of gentrification to place, the suggestion here is that studies need to observe the streets themselves and go behind closed doors.

An in-depth, bottom-up materialist approach to gentrification would instead begin with the buildings themselves, the manner in which they are furnished and designed, styles of lighting, the colours of the doors and the choice of the paint used, the ornaments on the dressing table, which frame and constitute everyday life (see Samuel 1994, part I, for some general discussion of the built environment, and Attfield 1989, 2000; Blunt 2008; Dovey 2010, chapter 5; Frykman and Löfgren 1987; Gregson 2011; Halle 1993; Miller 2001, 2009 for discussions of the material culture of the homes and their biographies).

Schacter (chapter 10) returns us to the streets themselves, in this spirit, to consider gentrification from a critical and political material culture perspective in a study of graffiti and street art in Shoreditch in east London over a 15-year period. He discusses the multiple platial characteristics of graffiti and street art in east London and examines its changing temporal character and socio-political character. Schacter charts the temporal transformation of graffiti and street art’s material inscription on the buildings and walls from being initially transgressive, the illicit creative ephemeral artefacts of a clandestine act of resistance and rebellion to the city authorities, to something done openly and deemed acceptable and institutionalised. Originally ‘dirt’, matter out of place, it has been purified.

The power of these images to make any difference as an act of rebellion and resistance becomes defused. The images now become part and parcel of the re-presentation of this place as somewhere that is distinct and different because of their presence. It can thus both be packaged, marketed and sold to tourists by the London Tourist Board and equally appeal to the influx of new urban hipsters. The political and social impact of these images becomes hijacked and is intimately linked to the gentrification of this area of the city. The art becomes part of a new spurious heritage of the place, valued in terms of the additions it now makes to property prices, lifestyle shopping and consumption on the streets, and tourist revenues. Schacter argues that the performative material agency of the images, their possibility to make a difference, has become defused in the process. Now drained of political content, the appropriated subversive look and feel of these images is now considered
‘cool’, forming the increasingly commercialised and commodified urban landscape that Shoreditch has become.

The new arbiters of ‘taste’ and the social acceptability of once dirty images to be scrubbed away and removed are now the council authorities. The council sanctions and blesses their inscription in place. The images thus become part of the planning process in the creation of a theme park in which the streets themselves become an outdoor museum for an aestheticised experience rather than a critical interrogation of the city.

Conclusions

Anthropologists always work at the small scale. There is no prospect or possibility of producing an ethnography of the city in its totality, but we may hope to provide it by considering in detail the constellation of places within it that make it up. A defining characteristic of an anthropological participatory and phenomenological ethnography of place is that it necessarily requires a fine-grained focus. It eschews the abstractions of many urban studies in an attempt to return to the materiality of the real. We might imagine, in the future, an entire programme of such studies discussing and describing in comparative research the fine-grained detail of London as performed and lived: studies of football stadiums, art galleries and museums, restaurants, different public squares and parks, walks through shopping streets and malls, investigations of residential streets and neighbourhoods in different parts of the city and the interiors of people’s homes.

This book aims to further encourage such an approach and project in the belief that if we are ever to develop a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the entangled intersections of the materialities and socialities of everyday life in London, such a perspective provides the only realistic possibility of doing so. The city touches people physically, sensually, socially and culturally. They in turn are touched by it. This is the other way of telling that this book aspires to stimulate and promote.

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