

THE MARKET PLACE AND SPACE

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Abstract: This paper explores the market hall as a tool for understanding social engagement in a state of transient occupation, through the mapping of sensory experience, as opposed to the contemporary idea of the supermarket as a 'destination'. This is discussed through theoretical references and written evidence, which informed the basis of an interior design study run with 2nd year undergraduate Interior Design students in 2009. An existing market hall, situated in London's East End, was hypothetically regenerated back to its intended use, as an extension of the market place considering its affect on the surrounding spaces as well as the nature of the collection of users and their patterns of activity. The focus of the project was to bring different communities together by creating a venue that will appeal to different user groups, through its activities, types of trading and as an essential place for the community to buy local produce. The outcomes from the project will help to inform ways of thinking about retail space, as a sensory experience.

Key Words: transient space, sensory, sustainable, retail, market

Introduction

Market spaces have a diverse historical context that can be scraped back to reveal the market as a necessity to the survival of the city and the hub of the community. Our needs for market space have changed as our social behavior has become more restrained by our lifestyles, turning the market into a destination for a tourist experience rather than an essential activity of the day, with our need for sustenance now fulfilled with the convenience of the supermarket and online shopping. This paper looks to examine the role of the market as a place for social interaction through the connection of sensory experience giving the space a meaning of place, which can begin to inform the design process of 'destination' shopping through a project based study from which theories can be derived.

Markets

Historically, the marketplace has played a major role in the emergence of cities, from the covered markets of Central Asia and China, the Arab souk, the Roman forum, and the street markets and market places of European cities, to name a few. Markets are traditionally the places where food and other essential items, were brought into the city from the surrounding farmland or from the sea in terms of imported goods and fish, to be sold to the masses. The trade routes for the transportation of such produce have been instrumental in creating communities in the form of villages and towns along the way. In some countries, the market is still the hub of the city. It is a place for engagement, creating a buzz with its richness in activity, sound, colour, smells and experience. The market is transient, ever changing and is intrinsic to the urban landscape.

*'A route may pass through different points of interest, all of which may be places of assembly; sometimes markets define fixed points on a route; and although the market itself may be the centre of attraction, the space where it is held may also contain a monument (the shrine of god, the palace of a sovereign) marking the centre of a different social space.'*¹

When the City of London was planned, the strategy was to meet the essential needs of all of the residents of the city. Markets were seen as a necessary component of sustenance to the city and were *'intended to serve bodily needs as the church served spiritual ones'* ². As a result, London had a wealth of sizeable wholesale markets- Smithfield's for meat and Billingsgate for fish, both of which are still running today, Borough Market, Covent Garden Market and Spitalfields Market for fruit and vegetables, of which, only Borough remains as a food market. After a turbulent history, Borough Market now finds itself in the midst of the new trendiest part of London and the market hall is buzzing with tourists and 'suits'. In the book, *Hungry City* by Carolyn Steel, it is discussed that the Market has lost its core value of bringing food into the city to feed the city and is now a place for 'foodies', who seek high quality locally sourced produce, which is 'specialist' and expensive. Covent Gardens, Jubilee Market Hall is now famous for its Arts & Crafts Market and a major tourist attraction. Spitalfields Market has recently been regenerated with a modern insertion housing cafes, restaurants and up market shops, although there is a hint of a food market with several stores on a Sunday selling specialty food. The market is now half of its original size.

People traditionally came to markets to socialise as well as buy food; the market place was a hub for the community, a place for engagement. It has been observed that, on Sundays, in London's East End, Petticoat Lane street market is full of life and activity. Brick Lane street market however, has shrunk in disappointing proportions and now only contains a small number of local traders and a number of residents selling personal items. The market is now mainly occupying indoor space in the Truman Brewery's vast warehouse buildings and is branded 'Up Market Sunday'. It is a place where you can buy street food, craft objects and clothing. What is evident however is the sense of different community types coming together, creating a buzz of the market as the outdoor market and the indoor markets merge.

Supermarkets

The need to feed a City through its markets has been eradicated due to the rise of the Supermarket. Large conglomerates now ship food of all types around the world to fulfill the needs of the masses. The food is cheap, easily accessible, and readily available and does not depend on the seasons to grow. The taste and quality of food is controlled- misshaped fruit and vegetables are thrown away, chicken breasts are pumped with water to make them fatter. The experience of supermarket shopping is described by Chatel & Hunt in their book *'Retailisation'* as mundane and tedious. So much so that the physical space of the supermarket is threatened by e-commerce. Retail designers are constantly evolving the retail space and thinking of new ways to create a shopping experience. Chatel & Hunt believe that the only way to make supermarket shopping more exciting is by turning them into a destination with educational or entertainment facilities.

Auge, in the publication *'Non-places'*, also picks up on the notion of the mundane experience of the supermarket and describes the sequence of laborious events experienced by the user.

'The customer wanders round in silence, read labels, weighs fruit and vegetables on a machine that gives the price along with the weight; then hands is credit card to a young woman as silent as himself.' ³

Supermarkets are now 'lifestyle' stores with different types of retail coming together under one roof. The supermarket environment is somewhat clinical and logical and organised in a way that is easy to navigate. Signage and packaging are generic and bold. Aisles are wide and continuous. Produce is stacked high and plentiful, giving the impression of a warehouse. Fruit and vegetables are grouped together and displayed as in markets, using their colour as a selling point, the main difference being that the produce is packaged and sorted into cellophane and is branded with stickers.

The supermarket experience is now a familiar environment that provides essential needs. The relationship between supermarkets and markets is evident in the reason for its existence and the translation of product display, but in many ways, they are opposites. Supermarkets do not recreate the sense of community and social engagement that a market does and could not be described as the hub of the city. It does not have the ambience and sense of experience that a market has. This need for convenience suits our modern lifestyles of long working hours and the move of women away from the home and into the workplace. What Supermarkets do not do, is bring quality to urban life. The interiors of such places are systematic and functional with no sense of human interaction or social activity. It is a 'non-place' in comparison to the traditional market hall.

*'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.'*⁴

The Project

This project was created to test the theory of the relationship between sensory experience and the social interaction of space, positioned in a location known for its transient nature and cultural mix. The market place was used as a vehicle to explore this notion. This project looks at creating bridges between user groups, so that social interaction can take place, and to regenerate an existing building back to its original use, as a market hall, whilst exploring the transient nature of space through the senses. The aim of the project is to establish a set of theories that can be used to inform the design process of contemporary retail spaces by reviving the experiential qualities of the market place.

Sensory Experience and Social Interaction

The integration of the sensory experience into the designed space is an approach that has been put to architects and designers as a way of addressing the way spaces feel and how we interact with them. Juhani Pallasmaa's book, *The Eyes of the Skin*, discusses our connection with space through the body and how the two are invariably entwined. He advocates the importance of thinking through design with more conviction than using sight alone.

*'We behold, touch, listen and measure the world with our entire bodily existence, and the experiential world becomes organised and articulated around the centre of the body. Our domicile is the refuge of our body, memory and identity. We are in constant dialogue and interaction with the environment, to the degree that it is impossible to detach the image of the Self from its spatial and situational existence.'*⁵

In Knueppel's paper, *Interspace: Spatial and Temporary Formation of Sensory*

Communities within Interior Environments, the current issues of multi-sensory, spatial and temporal design in relation to social interaction, are explored. Knueppel discusses that designers control to what extent the spatial composition encourages or limits social interaction. The paper concludes that the multi-sensory experience can produce or inhibit temporary connections between people and that commercial interiors are in some ways missing part of the sensory quality of space.

In retail environments, the designers play with the notion of creating a fantasy that taps into stimulating the senses as part of the marketing strategy. The result of which creates an escape from reality that meets conscious needs and desires. This is very much a personal experience rather than a social one. Chatel & Hunt discuss that

*'In a society where family networks and strong community have disappeared, consumption offers a sense of belonging and is an expression of social status.'*⁶

Transient Occupancy

The area chosen for the project study was London's Brick Lane, which is famous for its multi-cultural community consisting of Jewish and Bangladeshi immigrants, students, artists and City workers. The transient nature of the area can be mapped through the buildings, in their fabric and histories. Lichtenstein's book 'On Brick Lane' discusses these histories through stories from the streets residents and identifies Fournier Street, off Brick Lane, as demonstrating good examples of buildings that map the transient history and nature of its residents. The houses were originally built for the wealthy French Huguenots in the 18th Century. They were later divided up as the weaving industry declined. The spaces were then used as lodgings and workshops by the weavers, then later by the Jewish community who worked in the textile trade under very poor conditions. The properties remained this way when the Bengali community moved in during the 1970's, swiftly followed by developers in the 1990's when The Spitalfields Trust began regenerating the buildings, returning them to single occupancy dwellings. The properties became highly desirable to wealthy city workers and artists who now reside there.



Figure1. Photograph taken in February 2009, depicting a shop façade on Fournier Street still retaining the original fascia sign from the Jewish occupation, now covered in graffiti.

Through personal observation, it can be identified that the nature of occupancy of the users and settlers around Brick Lane is cyclical with a definite pattern emerging throughout a typical week. The local people; these being the Bangladeshis, artists and students, are present throughout the week and can be seen at anytime in the typical pattern; the market traders and their stalls occupy the streets with their trade peaking on Sunday; the city workers who are frenetic, structured in their movement and dependable in their rigid workday pattern are apparent from Monday, peaking on Thursday and Friday evening, spilling out of pubs and curry houses; and the tourists arrive to frequent the markets on Sundays, soaking up the atmosphere and experience. As is the nature of areas of cities that have a very definite weekly function, Saturdays are quiet with very little activity.

Building Regeneration

Off the centre of Brick Lane, on Fashion Street, sits the old Moorish Market Hall, known as Fashion Street Arcade. In an article by Watson called *'Rebuilding London: Abraham Davis and his Brothers, 1881-1924'*, the details of the buildings history and ownership are documented. The building was designed by Abraham Davis and built in 1905 with the intention of housing local market traders. The interior comprised of 63 shops and had two entrances onto Fashion Street and one onto Brick Lane. However, the building ceased trading as a market in 1909 when it became obvious that the market traders were used to the hardened weather and the building was under-used. The building has had a number of uses since. It became a factory soon after and had a number of 'mysterious' fires during that time. The damage can still be seen on the façade. It now houses a fashion college and offices. The building is located centrally to the main areas of occupation: Bishopsgate, Commercial Street and Brick Lane creating a link between the city workers, the artistic community and the immigrant community. The decision to regenerate this particular building is due to its location, past use and its architecture. The building is located close to Christ Church with its potential allotment plots, Spitalfields City farm with its growing area, polytunnels, farm and community projects, and Tower Hamlets with its green spaces and urban plots. This gives the market potential to source and sell locally produced goods. The façade with its large arched entrances and the open plan interior space make the transition back to a market hall complimentary to its original structure, eradicating the need for mass demolition in favour of regeneration and a smaller carbon footprint. The fire-damaged parts of the building are currently open to the elements and are advantageous to the prospect of including urban plots. Also, as our lifestyles have changed dramatically since the early 20th Century, so does our response to outside environments. Users will be far more responsive to the idea of an indoor market than in 1905, as our experience of food shopping is now of indoor supermarket spaces. The combination of trading, growing, affordable produce and a lifestyle experience should make for an environment that appeals to the locals for their daily sustenance, the tourists for the East End experience, and the city workers for lifestyle and quality.



Figure 2. This photograph of the Moorish Market Hall, taken in February 2009, shows the ornate façade. The building was under refurbishment at this time, with a contemporary glass insertion constructed in place of the fire-damaged structure.

Mapping through Sensory Experience

The study began with a two-week joint project between Architecture and Interior Design students, which explored two themes: investigating how we use our five senses and exploring the notion of how people come together in space. In groups, students worked with an artist, scenographer or dancer to explore interior and exterior space through analytical and experiential drawings in a visual diary. Different sites were used for different groups: a shopping centre, a church and the seafront. Students focused on movement in space, the narrative of space, words and sound. The full details and theories surrounding this project are discussed in Mitchell's paper 'Narrative Space: Temporary Occupation'. These site investigations were then used as a theoretical starting point for the design process of the market project.

Students continued the process learnt in the initial exercise to map the sound, movement, touch, sight, smell and taste in and around Brick Lane as a way of discovering the narrative of the area and the building. This was applied through observation of people movement, interacting with the building from its urban setting and into the interior, using touch to distinguish what the space physically feels like, recording the sound of the streets, photographing the pictorial context of graffiti, graphics and signage, and smelling the distinct spices from the curry houses along Brick Lane. They made careful consideration to light and colour in their investigations and through workshops, using the market and its produce as a point of inspiration as well as considering materials that relate to the context of the area. This process began to examine the nature of the transient market place. The different strands of the market place were appraised through both the sensory; the sound of the market stall, sound through the mosque, sound through the church, for example, as well as exploring analytically through more traditional tools; urban analysis, geometric and structural analysis of the building, light analysis and ergonomics. Students also analysed pattern, threshold (entrance, exit interior/exterior), people movement (rhythm, pace and route), people mapping (age, gender, ethnicity), mapping cyclical activity through the day through to night and the week, and the mapping of urban plots, as streams of thinking.



Figure 3. Conceptual drawing describing people movement between Brick Lane and the City by Stephanie Harris, BA2 Interior Design 2009

Personal Perspectives

To understand the community structure from a residents point of view, at the start of this project a visit was conducted to the newly regenerated, Hawksmoor designed, Christ Church where we met with Fay, the events coordinator, who has grown up and lived around Brick Lane all her life; and Hosten who had come to the area from Jamaica in the 1960's. They have both been active members of the 'Friends of Christ Church' for many years and discussed with us the community programs they are involved in- alcohol and drug rehabilitation, reaching out to prostitutes, working with Christ Church School children and the local Bangladeshi community, and providing services to the city workers, to name a few. They talked about the transient nature of the area and how quickly changes take place. Christ Church itself represents these changes in its history of use, deterioration, and regeneration. Fay stated that *'it is not the building that makes a Church successful, but the work the church does in the community'*. The visit allowed us to observe how markets also contribute to the surrounding communities, bringing different social and cultural groups together for a purpose. Interior spaces are temporarily transformed to accommodate the market stalls and quickly changed back into car parking space, storage and exhibition space for the rest of the week. Spitalfields market hall is the only designated indoor market space and has a small level of trading happening throughout the week. This trade is craft based- clothes, jewellery etc. appealing to tourists.

Project Outcomes

This project was informed through cultural and historical reference analysis and sensory experience allowing for design concepts to be drawn and explored through transient occupancy. Ways of thinking were discovered about the transient nature of human occupancy and the temporary nature of human existence and how this can inform the design process. The research, analysis and concept development formed the basis of the design project, with the user at the core of the design strategy. Students decided through their research, how to provide a flexible 'market' space that accommodates the needs of the different types of users through facilities, trade and as an extension of the market place.

The spatial investigation and design of the Market hall raised repeated design

solutions, which were perceived as the most important aspects of inquiry to design a place for both social interaction between transient groups and trading. These solutions can be defined as movement, places to gather, places to observe and places to grow. The notion of movement played a vital role in the final spatial designs and in bringing social groups together. The circulation questioned how the user experiences the space and becomes part of the community or chooses to avoid social contact, depending on the nature of the user, suggested through pace formed by habits or rituals, age and gender, or time constraints. Movement is also dependent on the changing of light and shadow, playing with the idea that the fabric of the building or the content of the market does not change, but the matter around it does, using the transient nature of the occupants as a device to create the experiential nature of space. The identified routes around the market are controlled and broken by opportunities to meet and mingle in social areas or 'market squares', which can be traced back to the layout of existing market halls. These are spaces for interaction or can be observed. Places for observation are apparent throughout the schemes in the form of balconies, mezzanines, cafes and seating areas. Most students paid particular attention to the idea that the market could not only sell locally sourced produce, but could also, grow it on the premises. The case study of The Vinegar Factory, New York owned by Eli Zabar in Din's 'New Retail' book, became a good precedent for thinking about a market space that allowed for experimentation with food, growing organically on site and trading in a variety of ways. The cyclical nature of the user was interpreted through the changing activities through the day and night and different spaces being opened and closed to suit the pattern of activity and access required.

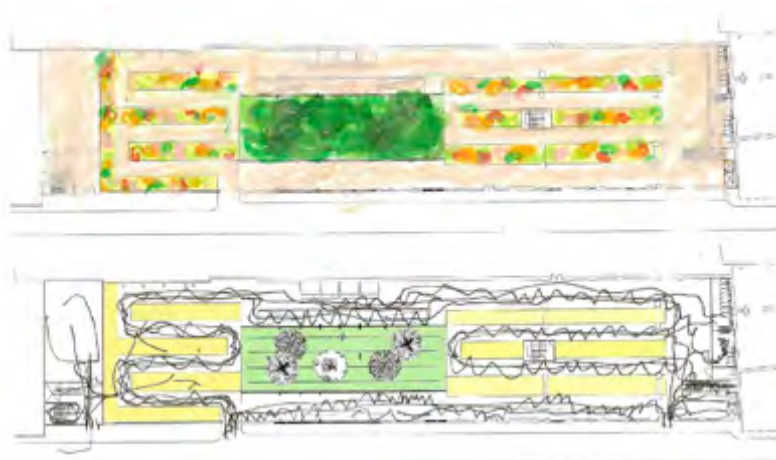


Figure 4. A proposed layout plan depicting the circulation strategy based on different types of users, pace and rituals with a growing space central to the overall scheme, by Stephanie Harris BA2 Interior Design 2009

All of the senses were investigated through the project. The idea that the fabric of the building could be enhanced to provide a rich layer of tactile qualities that suggest route and association with cultural identity manifested itself in pattern, texture and hierarchy through age and height. The exploration of sight came through the colour workshop, applying colour theories using the contextual material qualities and that of the natural produce as a palette. The longitudinal nature of the building and the character of the market space provided the opportunity to focus on the drama and theatrical nature of trading and to play with sight lines, vistas and distorted views. The

market as a place to interact or become a spectator was examined through sound. The market stalls demonstrating the process of trading through noisy interaction were arranged through scent. The 'market squares' sometimes noisy with performance or buzzing with the movement and interaction of people, and quiet observation areas through cafes or enclosed shops.



Figure 5. A sketch model demonstrating the longitudinal nature of building, apertures to expose sight lines between floors and create spaces to observe, and market stalls lining the walls by Yee Nei Chan BA2 Interior Design 2009

The project has provided the basis on which to draw out and test theories through future research surrounding spatial and interior design processes, which will be investigated through the retail sector. In summary, the main attributes on which to construct and formulate progression are through movement, sight, sound and touch. The design outcomes are visually stimulating and re-humanise a space into a place and provide a framework on which to extend critical inquiry into the aspiration of a destination shopping experience.

Endnotes

¹ Auge, M. (2006) *Non-places: Introduction to the anthropology of Supermodernity* Verso, London P. 57

² Thorne, R. (1980) *Covent Garden Market: Its History and Restoration* The Architectural Press, London P. 8

³ Auge, M. (2006) *Non-places: Introduction to the anthropology of Supermodernity* Verso, London P. 99-100

⁴ Auge, M. (2006) *Non-places: Introduction to the anthropology of Supermodernity* Verso, London P. 77-78

⁵ Pallasmaa, J. (2005) *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* John Wiley & Sons Limited P. 64

⁶ De Chatel, F. and Hunt, R. (2003) *Retailisation: The here, there and everywhere of retail* Europa Publications P.40

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