CHAPTER 2

Extending the Frontiers of City Tourism: Suburbs and the Real London

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Introduction

Two of the grand themes in tourism research and writing are growth – of tourist numbers, of destinations and of the scope of the visitor economy; and authenticity – the search for a tourist experience that seems 'real'. This chapter looks at the interaction between the very rapid growth in London's international visitor numbers, the city's changing economy and places, and tourists' concern with authenticity. It draws upon the University of Westminster's work on tourism in London and other World Tourism Cities (WTCs), which has shown that many visitors seek the 'real' city and that synergies between tourists and residents are important in reconfiguring, reimagining and reimaging places within the city (see for example Maitland (2007; 2010; 2014), Maitland and Newman (2004; 2009), Pappalepore et al. (2010; 2014), Cherifi et al. (2014)). In WTCs, tourism now thrives in once unfashionable areas of the inner city (for example, Brooklyn, New York City; Hoxton, London; Kreuzberg, Berlin (Maitland and Newman 2009)), and plays an important and synergistic role in the new economy of the inner city (Hutton 2009). But as development

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pressures and tourism numbers increase, areas that were previously off the beaten track become incorporated into recognised tourism circuits and lose their distinctiveness. This means that 'urban explorers' (Maitland 2007) must look further afield in their search for the 'real' places where they feel they can get 'backstage' (Goffman 1959).

Swift and largely unplanned changes to London and in its population, together with shifting views about what constitutes 'the tourist', complicate the idea of a 'real city' that can be 'discovered' by visitors. So, tourists in search of the real city may now have to look further off the beaten track – into the suburbs. At present, suburbs seem unlikely new tourist destinations. However, place images can change, sometimes radically. Twenty-five years ago, attempts to attract visitors to inner city areas in the USA and the UK were novel and often derided (see, for example, Beioley et al. 1990); yet such areas now constitute London's hippest destinations.

This chapter draws on evidence and ideas from the University of Westminster's research on tourists' attempts to get off the beaten track in London and in other WTCs. It considers how far suburban areas can meet the demands previously satisfied by areas in the inner city, and whether their associated images and imaginaries can change as radically. The focus is London, though the ideas may prove applicable elsewhere. The chapter begins with consideration of why off the beaten track areas appeal to visitors, and examines the rapid changes in London that are shrinking what tourists have seen as the 'real city'. The qualities that constitute the 'real city' for visitors are identified, and the work assesses how far those qualities can also be found in the suburbs. The chapter concludes with an overview of the potential of suburban areas for tourism, emphasising that negative image and imaginaries are crucial obstacles preventing the extension of tourism into suburbia.

Soft Tourism in the World City

The search for (lost) authenticity and a desire to get 'backstage' to discover 'real' places is a long established, though contested, theme in narratives of tourist practices and experiences (MacCannell 1999; Pearce and Moscardo 1986). 'Getting off the beaten track' has been more strongly associated with backpackers exploring exotic (to them) countries far from home. However, going 'off-piste' has become increasingly important to many city visitors, especially in WTCs, with their high-profile global brands and their capacity to generate new tourism areas. For some tourists, exploring the city and getting off the beaten track is at the heart of their visit, but for many more it is an important element in their overall experience of the city. They want to 'see the sights' and do some of the things that they know to be 'touristy' – yet also want to spend some time experiencing the 'real city' (Maitland and Newman 2009). The desire to be an urban explorer, for at least some of the time, stems from the increase in

London's visitor numbers, and changes in tourists' characteristics and preferences. There is a long-established growth in the number of international visits to London (see Chapter 1). Numbers increased from 14.7 million in 2010 to 15.5 million in 2012, 17.4 million in 2014, and 19.5 million in 2016. In June 2017, numbers were up 7 per cent on 2016 (Visit Britain 2017). There have been short-term variations, but growth has continued through exchange rate fluctuations, fears of war, terrorist incidents, and after the decision to leave the EU. This relentless rise has obvious consequences. Pressures on traditional tourist hotspots intensify, and affect the visitor experience. For the industry, there are stronger commercial incentives to produce a commodified touristscape, whilst visitors respond as they seek out places that seem to them less commercialised. At the same time, decades of uninterrupted growth in tourism have affected the tourists themselves. Many more are now frequent and experienced travellers who have already 'seen the sites' – both literally as they return frequently to cities like London, or metaphorically, because they have travelled extensively and have little desire to visit more 'top attractions'. 'Real London' rather than 'Brand London' provokes their interest and adds to their cultural capital. Finally, more visitors are 'connected tourists' (Maitland 2014), people who know the city well because they previously lived, worked or studied there or are connected to it by the friends and relatives they have come to visit or the work colleagues they meet when they come to the city on business. Connections mean these tourists have ready access to the 'backstage' places, and perhaps a strong motivation to continue to explore the city they used to live in, or to experience the city life of their friends, relatives or colleagues. (See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the impact of Airbnb).

Moreover, for experienced and connected visitors, the focus of city tourism is shifting. It is moving away from relying principally on exploiting tangible resources like historic buildings or museums and galleries towards a concern with intangible resources like lifestyle and image. That means that 'having' a holiday, or 'doing' the sights has less appeal than 'becoming' different through the effects of the tourist experience (Richards and Wilson 2007). For Andersson Cederholm (2009) 'being' is an emerging tourism value: being with oneself, in a contemplative fashion; being with co-tourists, especially those with shared values and interests; and being with local people – an essential element in experiencing place. At the same time, it has become increasingly difficult to isolate and separate tourists and touristic practices as tourism comes to be seen as simply one of a suite of mobilities (Hannam 2009), and touristic practices overlap with those of city residents (Franklin and Crang 2001).

The result is that many tourists are urban explorers for at least some of their visit. We can see this as 'soft tourism' whereby 'tourists albeit temporarily, "embed" themselves … and experience locally distinct cultural activities, products and environments' so that they can integrate themselves in the city as they 'occupy the same physical spaces and satisfy their existential and material needs in the same manner as members of the host society' (Oliver and Jenkins

2003, 296 and 297). In other words, urban explorers want to find distinctive places where they can integrate themselves in everyday life, and so experience the real. As Hall (2007, 1139–1140) says, 'Fakery occurs when the form of the physical or social object loses its integration with the everyday life of the place in which it is situated', whereas 'authenticity is born from everyday experiences and connections which are often serendipitous, not from things "out there". They cannot be manufactured through promotional and advertising deceit or the "experience economy"'. However, as London changes, it becomes more difficult to find the real city and enjoy soft tourism, the everyday and serendipity.

So urban explorers seek a soft tourism experience – which allows them to experience the real city by finding ways to embed themselves in it – by exposing themselves to serendipity and the everyday. However, changes in the city itself mean they need to be resourceful to do so.

Real London and Brand London

In one sense any place is authentic and real – it is as it is. But as Knox (2005, 3) points out, drawing on Heidegger, elements of the modern world – telecoms, technology, mass production, mass values – subvert the 'authenticity' of place so that 'city spaces become inauthentic and "placeless", a process that is, ironically, reinforced as people seek authenticity through professionally designed and commercially constructed spaces and places whose invented traditions, sanitised and simplified symbolism and commercialised heritage all make for convergence rather than spatial identity'. As Real London recedes, visitors' search for authenticity drives the growth of Brand London. We can see commercial spaces as attempts to satisfy visitors' demands for existential authenticity where the place conforms to the city of their imagination. Salazar (2013, 34) argues that imaginaries are 'socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings and are used as meaning-making and world–shaping devices' and that exoticised imaginaries of otherness prompt tourism. Potential tourists imagine a 'paradisiacal environment where local landscape and population are to be consumed through observation, embodied sensation and imagination'. Such paradisiacal environments are not confined to clichés of white beaches and waving palms. Local landscapes and populations can be consumed in these ways in cities – by embedded tourists.

Imaginaries of cities are complex and, in some ways, contradictory. London is well known and well publicised, a carefully promoted global brand, and is undergoing radical and rapid change. Yet imaginaries of London are slow to change. Research on the images of London held by Czech non-visitors (Cherifi et al. 2014) show that images that would appear very old-fashioned can be stable and slow to change. There have been energetic attempts to refashion London's image – not least through the expensive staging of the 2012 Olympics. However, Visit London's (2015) advice to first time visitors featured just three

main images: Buckingham Palace, Tower Bridge and Piccadilly Circus (along with a subsidiary image of visitors poring over a large paper map: very retro). The imaginary of heritage, history and royalty remains well supported.

Yet over the past 20 or so years, London has been changing radically and profoundly. As Kuper (2015) shows, it has risen to the top of global reputational league tables – constantly vying with New York City. He argues that three factors account for this. First, London is now a global rather than a national capital and attracts money and talent from across the world. Second, it has become more colourful – for example through renewed public spaces, spectacular architecture like Tate Modern or the London Eye, a renowned restaurant scene, street life, bars and cafes – and become more eventful: the Olympics are only the most obvious example. It has become more colourful, too because of its cosmopolitan population, attracted to London in part because now 'it is a place without a dominant national culture … to most foreigners London now looks like a place where you can self-actualise' (Kuper 2015, 3). A good place for being and becoming, then, but one in which the sense of place and sense of itself is blurred, complex and contradictory. Finally, and paradoxically, London offers stability – a long history, institutions that have evolved slowly, and sufficient political stability to attract global elites who want somewhere safe to keep their money and their family. Brexit will impact on all these trends, but thus far seems unlikely to change them profoundly.

This evolution has transformed places within London, most obviously through very rapid rises in property prices, seen by commentators as driving the working classes, lower middle classes and increasingly the professional middle classes from the central and inner city (see for example Minton 2017). This is what Erenhalt (2013) termed 'the great inversion' of a long-established pattern of poor inner cities and prosperous suburbs. Now, wealthy elites have moved back to the central and inner city, whilst the poor, the less well-off and migrants move to outer areas. Indeed, some once bustling parts of the most expensive areas of central London have become quiet, as more and more of the housing stock is acquired by foreign owners, who are frequently absent or see their property as a secure asset to be kept vacant – 'safety deposit boxes in the sky' as the former Chief Planner at the City of London put it (Rees 2015). However, processes of real estate speculation and gentrification have reached into formerly unfashionable areas throughout inner London. As Ehrenhalt notes, 'creatives' and hipsters colonise rundown areas, attracted by low property prices and the opportunity to display their love of 'edginess'. They are followed by bourgeois–bohemians (bobos) many of them foreigners. As gentrification proceeds, the wealthy move in. In 2012, London residential property worth £83 billion was bought for cash – by those working in the City financial district, and by rich foreigners seeking a safe and profitable investment (Goldfarb 2013). This process provides an urbanism that is attractively well manicured and may be aesthetically appealing – but one where the private realm displaces the public (in gated communities or commercial spaces to which public access

is permissive, not an entitlement), and ideas of mixed communities are absent. The urban atmosphere may be appealing, but is placeless.

Tourism has played a significant role in transforming and reimaging run-down areas, with some tourists' urban preferences linking synergistically and seamlessly with those of some residents, and with tourism spending and tourist presence supporting the gentrification process (see for example Maitland and Newman 2009). However, super-gentrification and the profitability of new residential development is undermining the qualities that made the areas attractive, as rising real estate prices force out even long-established independent small businesses, restaurants and shops.

The very rapid increase in London's visitor numbers has helped drive the transformation of central and inner London, with areas that were once 'undiscovered' and off the beaten track increasingly drawn in to the commercialised tourist heart of the city. Although inevitably celebrated by much of the tourism industry, this process is problematic. As Bell and Welland (2007:2) commented, London is becoming as high-rise as New York City (see Chapter 6), and 'it can sometimes seem as though there is nobody over 30 on the streets and that a great experiment in mass immigration and assimilation is under way … in an effort to capture the flag from NY, London risks losing what makes it London'. Of course, areas and places in a dynamic city change constantly. In the 1960s, 'Swinging London' saw the incorporation of once off the beaten track areas like Carnaby Street and the King's Road in a newly fashionable and vibrant commercial scene (Rycroft 2002). But recent changes in London have been of a different scale. Perhaps, as Goldfarb (2013, SR5) claims, 'the delicate social ecology that made possible London's transformation into a great world city over the last two decades is past the tipping point'. For 'hard' tourism, often first-time visitors in organised groups who want to see London's iconic sights this may not matter too much; indeed, the addition of new 'world class' developments may seem an advantage. However, those whose imaginaries are of a different London and who want a more integrated soft tourism will need to work harder to search out the 'real London'.

Cool and Convivial: Getting off the Beaten Track

Research by Westminster academics on London and other World Tourism Cities has shown that some tourists want to get away from popular hotspots to places that seem off the beaten track. In London, the research has included visitor surveys with almost 400 respondents, and lengthy semi-structured interviews with a total of more than 200 interviewees, at non-central locations in the inner city (for example Islington, Bankside, Spitalfields, Hoxton, London Fields and Deptford); the research has been fully reported elsewhere (for example Maitland and Newman (2004; 2009), Maitland (2008), Pappalepore et al. (2011; 2014)). This research draws out three aspects of their experience that allow

urban explorers to get off the beaten track and feel they can embed themselves in the city. They are the combination of morphology and consumption landscape; image and imagined geography; and experiencing everyday life. Following Lefebvre (1991) and drawing on Collis, Felton and Graham (2010, 1050) in their discussion of suburbs, we can see these as the three elements that go to constitute place: the objective material space; the way space is imagined and represented; and how it is experienced.

The morphology of the areas is crucial for visitors, and they frequently describe and comment on buildings and urban form in detail. The areas visited are characteristically formerly industrial, working class and under-privileged, often with a strong representation of ethnic minority populations. Their urban form seems organic and unplanned, is at comparatively high density, and has intricate street patterns and buildings of a human scale. Visitors contrast this with tourist hotspots, seen as having monumental architecture and layout, or commercialised environments that seemed planned for visitors. Unlike monumental or carefully choreographed commercial environments, such places offer simultaneous rather than successive arrangements of spatial elements (Gospodini 2001), meaning that visitors have many options and choices in how they move around them. They are, in other words, easily and temptingly explorable. Indeed, a minority of visitors specifically commented on the pleasure of 'getting lost' – whilst knowing that they could and would regain their bearings. This intricate urban form contains a mix of land-uses and seems to have more independent businesses, often in the creative sector – arts, fashion, food, craft beers and so on – providing an attractive landscape of consumption. Branches of well-known national and international chains are comparatively rare. These qualities of the objective material space contribute to places that are distinctive and have a buzz.

The image or imagined geography of space intersects with this objective material space, and contributes to fulfilling the expectations many visitors have of the 'real London'. In these multi-purpose and heterogeneous spaces 'with blurred boundaries … a wide range of activities and people co-exist. Tourist facilities coincide with businesses, public and private institutions and domestic housing, and tourists mingle with locals, including touts … heterogeneous tourist spaces provide stages where transitional identities may be performed alongside the everyday actions of residents, passers-by and workers' (Edensor, 2000, 64). Novy and Huning (2009, 87) point out – when discussing Berlin – that 'particularly edgy, transitional and allegedly authentic urban settings such as industrial and warehouse districts, ethnic or immigrant enclaves and other neighborhoods where people on the margins of urban society live and work are today part of a growing number of tourists' travel itineraries ... Former no-go-areas have been turned into desired travel destinations, as their "authenticity", the alternative lifestyles of their residents and their different tangible and intangible cultural resources – music, art, history, traditions, the aesthetic of their built environment etc. – became attractive for outsiders'. This links

to Nancarrow et al.'s (2001) discussion of what constitutes 'cool'. For them it revolves around a search for the authentic and a valuing of insider knowledge about trends and consumption patterns outside the mainstream – a form of cultural capital. As Bovone (2005, 377) suggests, 'a fashionable quarter is one where urban lifestyles and production … are initiated before elsewhere'. Off the beaten track areas can satisfy the demand for a real London hidden from the mainstream, known only to insiders, and in some ways responding to a nostalgic desire for a city with an intimate villagey built environment and a consumption landscape of trend-setting independents, removed from homogenising global businesses. These places are imagined and represented as distinctive, since they have emerged organically through micro interactions in the market, and have not been planned as spaces for consumption by developers or public authorities. They are yet to be 'commercially appropriated' (Neill 2001) and their rundown origins offer 'grit as glamour' (Lloyd 2000) where visitors can experience 'safe danger'.

Subsequent work (Pappalepore et al. 2011; 2014) has investigated the role creative clusters play in the development and experience of tourism off the beaten track. We found that concentrations of creative industries provide visitors with opportunities for consumption and for the accumulation of cultural capital, drawing on and exploiting the presence of creative producers and other creative visitors, who are themselves perceived as an attraction. In such creative tourism areas, these elements combine with others we have already discussed – a particular morphology, and the opportunity to embed oneself in the everyday life of the city – to produce places that visitors see as real, with a bohemian atmosphere and cool image. Whilst we identified several varieties of practice (Edensor 2000) in the ways that visitors engaged with the areas, for most tourists, the sense that they were getting away from the mainstream was central to the appeal of the areas.

Places that are distinct from established, planned or commercially developed tourist bubbles offer the opportunity to experience the everyday life of the city, and mundane activities and routines become invested with interest and meaning. Quotidian activities like daily shopping, or people at work or in a café are interesting to observe, and confirm that these are not places planned for visitors. As one interviewee commented 'it doesn't feel artificial … you don't feel like you're in Disneyland'. Local people are key markers and signifiers that these are real places, and provide both confirmation of authenticity and a sense of the exotic. Another interviewee said 'tourist spots are always very generic, right, look at the places where tourists are in any city you feel like, oh, I'm just one of them and I'm just doing the typical tourist thing but if you, somehow, end up in the place where the locals go, it feels like a more authentic experience'. For others, Tesco, a mid-range supermarket, was 'one of our favourite places'. Of course, these tourists had not come to London specifically to spend time in Tesco. Rather, they wanted to integrate into the everyday life of the city, and the supermarket allowed them to do so, to mingle and observe local people,

see what they bought, and to participate in quotidian life. This opportunity was valued: 'it's more authentic and fun, because local people and tourists, they also mix. Here, you are not treated as a tourist' (Maitland 2008). A convivial relationship between tourists and locals seems an essential element in the experience of everyday life. In short, the tourist gaze of the outsider creates the exotic from ordinary life: the everyday is not simply ordinary – 'rather it is the site that contains the extraordinary within the ordinary if one is prepared to look' (Till 2009, 139). However, we should bear in mind that 'local people', from the tourist perspective, mean simply non-tourists. High levels of migration and rapid churn in the population of London's neighbourhoods means that meeting with truly 'local' people is comparatively uncommon – if by that we mean those born and bred in the area or who are long term residents.

The desire of some visitors to experience what they regard as the real city by getting off the beaten track seems clear. The 'real' derives from a combination of objective space, the experience of space, and imagined geography. However, getting off the beaten track in inner London has become increasingly difficult as booming property markets and rapidly increasing populations accelerate the rate of commercial appropriation and squeeze areas once seen as outside the mainstream and offering the possibility of experiencing everyday life. For those whose imaginaries are of a London of explorable places with interesting vernacular architecture, varied landscapes of consumption and little evidence of hard tourism, many gentrified areas will retain their appeal. We found that for some visitors, upscale neighbourhoods like Islington can feel like the real London, though they are increasingly dominated by global elites (Butler 2007). Areas like Spitalfields have continued appeal to many visitors, but now seem mainstream to those in search of cool places. They certainly no longer constitute Novy and Huning's (2009, 87) 'edgy, transitional and allegedly authentic urban settings'. Relentless development pressures in inner London have meant that little is now off the beaten track. Perhaps those in search of cool and convivial places and the real city should look to the suburbs.

Finding the Real City in the Suburbs

Hinchcliffe (2005, 2) points out that 'the literature on suburbs is extensive, and yet the subject always seems elusive. For some the suburb is a geographical space, for others a cultural form … for others a state of mind'. In other words, different commentators put different emphasis on the components of suburbs: their objective material space, imagined geography and experience of the everyday. This helps account for one of the difficulties of discussing suburbs and their potential appeal – avoiding 'the dangers of over-generalizing about cities and suburbs' (Phelps 2012, 259). It is especially important to avoid the illusion that the city's centre and periphery developed independently of one another. In reality, whilst suburbs have very different characters, they

Figure 2.1: Suburban Otherness: The Imagined Geography of Suburbs (Photo: John Maltby/RIBA Collections).

cannot be regarded in isolation from either the central city or its surroundings (Hinchcliffe 2005); rather they form part of a complex urban region. Perhaps this means that traditional distinctions are now meaningless. For Lang and Knox (2009), 'the city' and 'suburb' are 'zombie categories', irrelevant in a contemporary context.

London's suburbs are disparate and varied in their character (Phelps 2012). The Victorian development of London saw the construction of suburbs in what has since become inner London, whilst the outer suburban areas were constructed mainly in the twentieth century. In both eras, suburbs frequently grew, as had other parts of the city, from a pre-existing village nucleus. Some were predominantly residential but others were substantially industrial (e.g. Wembley and Willesden), and others had a mix of small businesses and housing (e.g. Acton). The high amenity inner and outer suburbs (Camberwell, Hammersmith, Putney, Ealing, for example) provided for those moving in search of more personal independence and freedom; they helped create a market for arts and crafts products and provided a home for new colleges providing arts education and training (Phelps 2012). Rather than there being a clear distinction between (inner) city and suburbs, we can see many shared qualities. The morphology of suburbs can echo many qualities of the inner city, with intricate street patterns stemming from village origins and complex patterns of land

ownership. Nineteenth and twentieth-century suburbs mix housing with small industrial buildings capable of conversion to other uses – lofts, workshops, studios and so on – whilst some larger industrial buildings have been converted to residential loft apartments or re-used as performance spaces or complexes of studios and workshops. There are architectural and heritage attractions ranging from William Morris's Red House in Bexleyheath; Eltham Palace, a royal palace transformed in the 1930s with an art deco interior; to Lawn Road flats (the Isokon Building), an architecturally influential modernist building that became a centre of north London intellectual life. Indeed, clusters of creative industries are to be found in several parts of suburban London (Freeman 2009). Despite the familiar arguments of Jacobs (1961) and Florida (2005), creative industries and creative workers are not confined to the inner city – they happily locate in suburban areas (Flew 2012; Collis et al. 2013). Indeed, it is argued that the 'bourgeois utopia' of high amenity suburbs are being reconstituted as locations for emerging small businesses including in professional and creative sectors, as urban businesses value proximity to home along with public and private services, amenities and green space whilst retaining links to regional professional and industry networks (Phelps 2012, 266).

And suburbs are of course pre-eminently the scene of everyday life, since they are 'the principal residential environment for the majority of the population' (Whitehand and Carr 2001, 182). Indeed, as London transmutes into a global capital with central and inner areas colonised by global elites, the suburbs are increasingly where 'the locals' are to be found – if by that we mean those for whom the city is their permanent and long-standing residence. London has transformed into a mega city of global migrants in which the majority (55 per cent) of the population is not White British. Much of that majority live in outer London – the suburbs: in 2011, half the black population and two thirds of the Asian population lived in outer London. Poles, Somalis, Afghans and Ghanaians live in places like Beckton, Ilford, Edmonton, Catford and Harlesden (Judah 2016). They bring with them culture, events, shops and restaurants that visitors in search of the exotic of the everyday may relish. Perhaps there are emerging similarities with Paris, a city in which the Boulevard Périphérique has long marked a clear divide between 'city' and 'suburbs'– the banlieues. Maspero (1994, 16, quoted in Phelps 2012) claims that it is in the banlieues that real, authentic life is to be found:

> 'where did they all go? To the outskirts. To the suburbs. Paris has become a business hypermarket and a cultural Disneyland … And didn't that mean the true centre was now "all round"?'

So, in terms of morphology, of objective material space, London's suburbs have many of the qualities of the inner city. Moreover, they are the real city, in which visitors who want to experience the exotic of the everyday can find it. And suburbs already receive many visitors. People visiting friends and relations go

to where their friends and relatives are to be found – frequently in the suburbs. Meanwhile enterprises like Airbnb make it easier to let rooms to visitors in unfamiliar areas (see Chapter 3) whilst rising property prices in central and inner London encourage budget hotels in outer areas. Yet we hear little of the appeal of suburbs for tourism, or the possibility that the well-established expansion of areas that tourists visit will continue outwards. This apparent paradox is resolved when we consider that the imagined geography of suburbs is relentlessly negative – and has increasingly diverged from reality (Collis et al. 2010). Any suggestion that suburbs may be attractive to visitors – or even cool – has run up against an apparently entrenched view that they are 'maligned … connoted an inferior form of city … an easy [insulting] epithet … shorthand for hypocrisy and superficiality' not least because limited academic attention has meant our 'understanding [has been] … restricted to an odd mix of cliché and dated pop culture' (Kirby and Modarres 2010, 65).

This negative imagined geography of suburbs has been constructed from academic and professional discourse and from high and popular culture. Ideas of a suburban dystopia, destructive of both city and countryside, can be traced in England at least from the work of Ruskin in the later nineteenth century, and a key purpose of the planning system that emerged in the UK with the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act was to manage suburban development and prevent sprawl. However, there was always more to this than an attempt to manage land-use patterns, and attitudes were inflected with a criticism of the imagined culture and politics of suburbs. Ian Nairn (1955, 365) in a provocatively polemical contribution saw suburbs as:

> the creeping mildew that already circumscribes all our towns. This death by slow decay is called subtopia … the world of low-density mess.

Whitehand and Carr (2001) point to the strong professional disdain of the suburbs by architects and planners, perhaps because of a built form that focuses on the individuality of single-family dwellings rather than the collectivist form of the Georgians or Modernists. They see this as accompanied by an intellectual scorn for the suburbs, presented as places inhabited by the undereducated lower middle classes, who are portrayed as conservative and status conscious. More recently, Florida's (2005) influential work on the creative class explicitly contrasts the bohemian enclaves of a dense inner city with the sprawl and (alleged) lack of creativity of the suburbs. So, suburbs come to be 'mythologised as places that exist somewhere else and are inhabited by people unlike ourselves' (Vaughan et al. 2009, 9): suburbanites are 'the Other' (Figure 2.1). Phelps (2012, 268) sees this as intellectual snobbery, and comments that the 'privileging of the city within academic and policy discourse may simply be the latest incarnation of "suburb bashing" by elites' and reflect 'imaginings of their own social worth'. Yet a sense of 'suburban otherness' may give a clue to what may attract tourists in search of the real.

This professional and academic disdain runs alongside similar cultural attitudes. In the 1890s, the satirical magazine *Punch* parodied the inhabitants of the new suburbs (now absorbed into inner London), most famously Mr and Mrs Pooter in *Diary of a Nobody*. Aspirant suburbanites, 'working hard to improve their economic and domestic security and claim the right to personal meaning for their lives' were sneered at by the established middle classes (Hapgood 2000, 40). George Orwell's attitudes to suburbs and their inhabitants were complex but in *Coming Up for Air* are overwhelmingly negative. 'You know how these streets fester over the inner-outer suburbs. Always the same. Long, long rows of little semi-detached houses' (Orwell 1939, 54). (The description of featureless and alienating places, inflected with the image of disease or infestation, is echoed by Nairn, above, and is common to much commentary on the suburbs). When George Bowling, the protagonist, tries to escape by returning to the nostalgically remembered England of his boyhood, he finds the village he grew up in has itself been engulfed in suburban development. The suburb stands for the inauthenticity and falseness of modern life, encapsulated when Bowling orders a frankfurter in the pub, and finds it tastes of fish. Literature and drama have retained this perspective on the suburbs. The critic Q.D. Leavis (1965, quoted in Webster 2000, 4) was especially disdainful: 'suburban culture … has no fine rhythms to draw upon and is not serious … it is not only formed to convey merely crude states of mind but it is destructive of any fineness'. The same attitudes can be seen in more popular work. Mike Leigh's 1970s stage and TV play *Abigail's Party* remains critically celebrated, but its disdainful view of suburban pretension shares attitudes with many largely forgotten suburban sitcoms like *Bless This House, George and Mildred, The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin* or *The Good Life.* Their 'sustained and popular indictment of suburbia … a monotonous world of lonely, frustrated housewives and henpecked husbands might have been scripted by upper-class intellectuals of the inter-war years'; although suburbs 'represented a dream come true for millions of ordinary families … intellectuals denounced their small-mindedness' (Sandbrook 2010, 331). The satirical magazine *Private Eye* (founded and edited by Oxbridge-educated public schoolboys) continues to present the suburb of Neasden as 'the symbol of everything base, boring and banal … where romance and imagination came to die' (Sandbrook 2010, 330).

We could go on. As Webster (2000, 4) says:

> There is a remarkable degree of consistency indeed uniformity in external perspectives on suburbia. The defining characteristics whether viewed from the country or the city tend to be reducible to unimaginative conformist design and behaviour determined by imitation rather than originality; a lack of individuality combined with excessive social homogeneity; spatially cramped and confined conditions and a neglect for, or undermining of, traditional values

He goes on to point out that some commentators are much more nuanced and interested in exploring the contradictions of suburbia. Some writing about suburbia displays a fondness, even nostalgia, for example the work of John Betjeman, who coined the term Metro-land for the suburbs along the Metropolitan Line from Baker Street, stretching North West out of the capital, or of Philip Larkin who 'definitely thought suburbanites and small towners live more authentic lives' (Harris 2010); or displays tensions and contradictions (the work of Hanif Kureshi or Nick Hornby, for example). And since the 1960s there has been a strand of English music that gently mocks the suburbs but values them – The Kinks' 'Shangri-La' and 'Muswell Hillbillies', The Jam's 'Tales from the Riverbank' as well as 'Wasteland'.

So, the relentless negativity of the imaginaries of suburbs is only part of the story; there is a fondness. But overwhelmingly, the portrayal of suburbs by academic and professional commentators is negative, despite some notable exceptions such as the early Willmott and Young (1960) study of the rich community life in a London suburb, and has been reinforced in popular and high culture. It is difficult not to see strong class elements here, as economic and cultural elites disdain the aspiration of lower middle and working classes, and scorn their attempts to change their class position. And this echoes familiar stereotypes within tourism: the superiority of the 'traveller' with high levels of economic, social and cultural capital to the plebeian mass tourist. Despite countervailing and revisionist views, that is a position that is hard to change. As Salazar (2013, 36) points out, tourism imaginaries can be immobile: 'in some destinations tourism imaginaries are so firmly established and all-encompassing that they are difficult to escape'. Yet, this is an imaginary that diverges from objective reality, and is out of date. Many suburbs share the morphological qualities of much of the inner city, and are home to creative industries and those who work in them. In contemporary London, the juxtaposition of boring, conformist, inauthentic and standardised suburbs with an inner and central city that is vibrant and authentic is not only an inaccurate and unflattering portrayal of suburbs – it is an inaccurate and far too flattering portrayal of the inner and central city. If London is turning into a 'mass gated community of the world's richest people' (Kuper 2015, 5), then the suburbs are the place to go for visitors who want to get off that beaten track and experience the real life of the city.

Conclusions: The New Real London

This chapter has drawn on extensive research in London and other WTCs to argue that many tourists want to get off the beaten track to discover the real city; that economic change, real estate development and rapid growth in visitor numbers mean that few parts of London's inner city can now be

seen as 'undiscovered'; and that suburbs can offer the qualities that urban explorers seek.

Growth in the numbers of tourists who are experienced travellers, often connected to the city they visit, has combined with the desire to experience the real and authentic to drive some visitors to leave well-established tourist beats and seek out new areas. These places seem to offer a real experience through a combination of morphology, an imagined geography that is distinctive, and the opportunity to experience the everyday life of the city – where exoticism can be found in the everyday, and there is an opportunity to fit in rather than stand out, whilst mingling with co-tourists who seem cool. However, the radical changes that London is undergoing make getting off the beaten track in inner London much more difficult. Rapid and relentless property development driven by demographic change and London's role as a safety deposit box for foreign investors means that even the least fashionable and most run-down areas of inner London are becoming expensive. A previous development route which saw semi-derelict areas colonised by artists and creative industries seeking cheap space and developing in synergy with adventurous tourists and pioneer gentrifiers is now largely closed. At the same time, central and inner London is increasingly defined by transience (Goldfarb 2013) with the ultra-affluent more segregated and less committed to a city that is more of an asset store than a home. For locals and visitors who seek out areas that are authentic, for the opportunity to mingle with each other and co-tourists and pick up style tips, and who value the cultural capital and cool image to be derived from knowing about places outside the mainstream, inner London has less to offer.

One spatial consequence has been for artists, gentrifiers and curious visitors to look further afield – in some cases to other cities like Berlin. 'Eight years ago, Neukölln was considered to be dangerous, not even in the guidebooks. Now it's filled with tourists and expats. I'm part of a big exodus from east London to south-east London then to Berlin. The New Cross to Neukölln Express' (Kamradt 2015). Within London, they could look to the suburbs, now home to poorer residents and migrants, where property values are lower, and where everyday life is lived. Perhaps the Express could run from New Cross to New Eltham rather than to Neükoln. This would reflect a pattern that saw, for example, the Kings Road reimaged as fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s, Notting Hill in the 1980s and 1990s, and Shoreditch and Hoxton in the early twenty-first century, and provide opportunities for new creative and tourist areas well away from the mainstream, undiscovered and therefore cool. (It could of course also begin a process towards the problems of transience and overtourism now manifest in new tourism areas in inner London – for example loss of local identity, or transfer of housing assets into tourism accommodation. However, that prospect seems some way off). Yet the very notion of cool suburbs as a place attractive to tourists or hipsters still seems unlikely. As we

have seen, this is despite similar morphology to formerly working-class inner London and it being the focus of the city's authentic everyday life. Rather, it is a consequence of a long established and relentlessly negative imagined geography that has made it almost literally impossible to imagine the suburbs as cool places, attractive to experienced travellers. Yet, there are reasons to think this may change.

The driving force of change is likely to be economy and demography as affluent incomers dominate inner areas, so that the suburbs and hinterland seem to have more to offer. But the very qualities that have made suburbs such objects of contempt may paradoxically build their attraction. If suburbs are home to 'the Other', then that in itself offers an exotic appeal for urban explorers. Webster (2000) sees the suburbs as liminal and ambivalent – not in the city, yet not outside it; not working class yet not upper class. Critics read this as superficiality and depthlessness – but the absence of a strong set of narratives and profound cultural signifiers could be seen as a strength. Wynn (2010) argues that the stuff of everyday experience, the free resources of culture, history and place, can be transformed into something meaningful – a process he terms 'urban alchemy'. In this process visitors use their experiences to create their own imaginaries and their own narratives of the city, drawing on everyday life and interactions with local people – both readily available in the suburbs. Suburbs are places where the everyday life of the city goes on, but which do not carry strong historical or cultural narratives – provided one can get away from a disdain of all things suburban. They are more malleable for the visitor, so that individual stories can be constructed; their otherness can be read as edgy, authentic and exotic. They can appeal to those 'tactical tourists' who 'look for places where they decide for themselves what they see and experience' and reject the 'specifically targeted strategies of the tourist industry' (Wolfram and Maier 2013, 362 and 365).

The growth of tourism in the outer city seems plausible, although I do not expect an immediate rush to the suburbs. It will be driven by the interplay of market forces and development opportunities with the desire of some tourists to escape places that have been commercially appropriated, as it was in off the beaten track areas in the inner city. Tourism developers and marketers will be involved, especially as the New London Plan (Mayor of London 2018) promotes densification and mixed-use development, often including hotels, in suburban hubs. However, their roles are limited – partly because their ability to intervene in development is circumscribed, partly because overt marketing of areas inevitably makes them mainstream. What would be helpful would be support for research. Currently there is almost no empirical work on how tourism is developing in the suburbs, how many visitors are involved, how far they explore the areas around their accommodation and whether processes are in fact comparable with those we have seen in the inner city. Tourism in the inner city was derided in the 1980s but is now integral to what London offers.

Perhaps in future, a visit to the cool suburbs will be equally essential – but we need more research before we can say so with confidence.

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