

## **Walls and other unremarkable boundaries in South London: Impenetrable infrastructure or portals of time, space and cultural difference?**

Kim Knott

Seemingly impenetrable, urban walls, fences and other hard surfaces of the city do not seem likely contenders for social and cultural innovation and interaction. Generally, they remain unnoticed and unremarked upon. Yet broken, traversed, entered or excavated, they become visible and open to narration and imaginative (re)construction. These inconspicuous man-made structures, crucial for the management of urban life, for ensuring the efficient flow of people and traffic, and for securing public and private property, have counter-cultural potential. As boundaries for keeping people and objects out or in and for separating human activity on the surface from what is below ground, they may permit access to previously hidden times and places, and may allow new encounters to take shape. Drawing on data from a research project on “Iconic Religion”, I eschew London’s iconic sites for the forgotten infrastructure in their shadows, and ask what new social relations and cultural imaginaries are generated by the wall separating a church from a market, a construction site behind a mosque, and a gate to a disused graveyard on land owned by Transport for London?

Kim Knott is Professor of Religious and Secular Studies at Lancaster University, and Deputy Director of the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats. Employing a socio-spatial approach, her current research interests are religious/secular relations, ideology and the sacred, and religion, diversity and security. Recent publications include *Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred* (with Poole & Taira, 2013), *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities* (with McLoughlin, 2010) and *The Location of Religion* (2005).  
[k.knott@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:k.knott@lancaster.ac.uk)

## **Walls and other unremarkable boundaries in South London:**

### **Impenetrable infrastructure or portals of time, space and cultural difference?**

Kim Knott\*

This man, with lime and rough-cast, doth present  
Wall, that vile Wall which did these lovers sunder:  
And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are content  
To whisper, at the which let no man wonder...

Wall. In this same interlude it doth befall  
That I, one Snout by name, present a wall;  
And such a wall, as I would have you think,  
That had in it a crannied hole or chink,  
Through which the lovers, Pyramus and Thisby,  
Did whisper often very secretly.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act V, Scene 1*

What role is played by walls and other unremarkable boundaries in social and cultural encounters and transitions across time and space?

Humans often overlook the contribution of objects in their environments, imagining that action is solely a function of organic processes, a consequence of human or animal life. However, as Shakespeare intimated in this comic scene, a wall – which both prohibits and allows social interaction – may be part of the action, in this case a player in a romantic entanglement. In this article, I will consider how seemingly impenetrable boundary objects, “edges” as I will call them, gather people and things together, and either inhibit or enable their physical, social and mental transitions. My particular interest is in the unexceptional edges associated with religious sites (not the buildings themselves), and I will argue that such edges and their openings, by their very nature, have the capacity to achieve what religious buildings do not. Although such buildings clearly have the potential to generate encounters with religion, they are rarely entered by outsiders. Unless they operate as tourist sites, what goes on inside generally remains undiscovered and mysterious to those outside their walls.

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Exterior walls, gates and other surfaces, however, are taken-for-granted boundaries that, when breached, open up the possibility of unexpected interactions.

The location for this study is Southwark, a socially and religiously diverse borough in South London, and the subject of research conducted as part of a European research project on “Iconic Religion”. I begin by situating my initial question in the recent debate about meaningful social encounters, where these might occur in a super-diverse context like Southwark, and under what conditions. This is followed by a theoretical discussion of the boundaries and entanglements associated with city infrastructure. I refer to the work of the urban design theorist, Kevin Lynch (1960), in particular his model of the elements by which city dwellers experience and describe urban form. I also draw on the ideas of the archaeologist, Ian Hodder (2012), whose account of “entanglement” offers a useful language for exploring those dynamic human/thing relations – of dependence and dependency – that emerge at points where people and the built environment come into contact with one another.

In order to assess how spatial phenomena enable or disable encounters with difference, I then turn to three case studies, of different edges, the bi-products of South London landmarks: a boundary wall separating Cathedral from market, a gate bordering land belonging to Transport for London that contains a pauper’s graveyard, and disused ground for development behind a local Islamic Centre.<sup>1</sup> In each of these cases, I examine how these edges – and the spatio-temporal breaks or openings that occur at points within them – lead to encounters with difference. In the final section, I suggest that different types of breaks or openings, which I call “vents”, “portals” and “holes”, permit differing relationships and patterns of encounter.

### **Diversity and the religious and urban context**

Critical examination of the theory and practice of multiculturalism has led in the last decade to new empirical research and the articulation of fresh concepts to account for the changing nature of urban diversity, and its potential for new ways of living together. The complexity of global cities and their populations has been encapsulated in the concept of “super-diversity” (Vertovec 2007), which addresses the “multiplication of social categories” under specific local conditions (Wessendorf 2014: 2), and the consequences for public policy and service provision. Further questions have arisen, however, about how and where people relate to one

another in super-diverse contexts, and what constitutes meaningful social interaction (Valentine 2008). Given the speed and mobility of contemporary urban living, people are thrown together, but encounters in public space are predominantly fleeting and superficial, and often people continue to lead parallel lives. Are such encounters beneficial for good relations and the avoidance of stereotyping, stigmatization and racism, or is more sustained and deliberate contact necessary to bring about these ends, and, if so, where is that possible?

Reviewing recent research on these questions, Valentine and Sadgrove (2014) stress the importance of the scholarly turn to *everyday life* for understanding the potential that routine contact in public spaces has for producing “cosmopolitan sensibilities and competencies as a by-product of socially diverse individuals rubbing along together as they go about their normal lives” (2014: 1980). Valentine and Sadgrove focus on personal biographies to examine “when contact with difference matters” (2014: 1993), but others have assessed the value of encounters with diverse others in everyday public locations such as cafés, markets, streets, parks and neighbourhoods (e.g. Hall 2015; Hiebert et al 2015; Vertovec 2015; Watson 2009; Wessendorf 2014). The importance of people “processing diversification” through routine interactions (Vertovec 2015: 255) has been stressed, but other points have been made too, such as the impact of the duration, frequency and repetition of contact, the value of private separation for public coexistence and, increasingly, the nature of the physical space and material conditions for the nature and quality of the interaction that may take place there. With regard to the latter, Mayblin et al (2015: 79) have observed that “surprisingly little attention has been paid to the physical configuration of space in work on encounters”. In response to this, they conducted a spatial experiment to generate “meaningful contact across difference”, in part to examine the effect of spatial arrangements on encounters, but also to allow participants “to escape the normative conventions of everyday life” (79) as they engage with others.

In this literature, the spaces of routine interaction have been investigated for their capacity to allow for or facilitate meaningful encounter, but the question of whether everyday practices and spaces impose debilitating “normative conventions” has also emerged. Getting different people participating collaboratively to generate shared micro-spaces of intimacy and inclusion (Mayblin et al) is one way of generating positive meaningful encounters and learning from the process. Most encounters, however, will not be generated by such creative interventions; they just happen, either because people “rub along together” (Valentine and

Sadgrove 2014; Watson 2009), or because the spatial, material or social conditions of their everyday locations require them to engage in some way (Hall 2015; Vertovec 2015). The important question arising from Mayblin et al's experiment, though, is whether the "normative conventions of everyday life" have to be broken, challenged or escaped in order for meaningful encounters to occur. If that is the case, can this happen in the unremarkable places I have in mind here? It is not my intention, after all, to discuss organised interfaith dialogue or ecumenical partnership, but rather the possibilities for cross-cultural encounter at the boundaries of religious sites.

In the Iconic Religion project we have asked how and where religion takes place in the city, and to what extent its material presence structures urban space and generates positive or negative encounters (Iconic Religion 2016; Knott et al 2016). As a result of global migration and religious pluralisation in Europe's major cities, material religion has become publicly important in a variety of ways, e.g. for urban tourism, cultural heritage, community engagement, welfare provision, identity politics, and for debates about equality and diversity (Dodsworth & Watson 2013; Garbin 2012; Oosterbaan 2014). In addition, religious place-making and other forms of religious production have been significant for minority communities and individuals in marking identities, staking public claims, forging relations with others, and being seen to be different (Garnett & Harris 2013; Stringer 2013; Vásquez and Knott 2014). Various tensions have emerged as important: for example, between the inconspicuousness and visibility of urban religion, its historic presence but also new forms, and its local specificity and global interconnections (Knott 2016; Knott et al 2016; Beekers and Tamimi Arab 2016). Furthermore, it is clear that religion in the city is in no way a settled matter, with processes of decline and decay, but also innovation and growth at work, and with the boundaries of "religion" and the "sacred" constantly open to negotiation.

Despite these tensions and shifts, if you ask people to identify religion in an urban context most will point to a building. From this perspective, encounters with religion and religious others become subject to human-object relations, public access, opening times, the readiness of insiders to welcome strangers within, and of strangers to cross the threshold. The barriers to interaction may be substantial; worth overcoming perhaps, but demanding of effort, courage and determination on both sides.

But what of those interactions generated at the external boundaries of such sites? Can these edges produce meaningful encounters with difference? Can they facilitate crossings or open up spaces that might seem closed or unwelcoming to outsiders?

### **Theorising infrastructural boundaries and entanglements**

I turn my gaze then from religious buildings in the urban environment to their external boundaries, the walls, gates and the ground underfoot, those edges that connect religious sites with the world outside or below ground. In doing so, I also shift the academic focus from economic and demographic zoning and the institutional organisation of urban localities (two of three socio-spatial approaches (Merriman (2015) to have dominated urban studies from the early days of the Chicago School) to a consideration of unremarkable physical boundaries and their social and cultural affordances. Simultaneously, such boundaries are common elements in the built infrastructure, hence part of other systems, *and* things or places in their own right. The edges I am interested in variously facilitate entrances and exits, protect property, enclose people or keep them out, and operate as material surfaces on which things can be placed. They exist in time as well as in space. Furthermore, such material boundaries create opportunities for relationships to develop.

In *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch (1960) analysed the responses of a sample of residents of Boston, Los Angeles and New Jersey to questions about their cities. He asked them to draw maps and to give “complete and explicit directions for the trip that you normally take going from home to where you work” (1960: 141). He encouraged them to picture themselves making the journey, to describe their emotions and to identify distinctive features. As a theorist of urban design, he was interested in how people represented their own places, and in how these views might contribute to the design and development of good, effective and dynamic cities. His analysis led to the development of a model of five types of elements – paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks (46). He understood these to be “the raw material of the environmental image of the city scale” (83); they were the building blocks through which urban dwellers could imagine a satisfying city form. Pre-empting later developments in urban studies arising from spatial, cultural and actor-network theory, Lynch gave credence to the materiality of these elements, the emotions they generate, their relationship to human actions and decision-making, and their mutuality and interdependency in the production of urban infrastructure.

Of particular interest here are Lynch's "edges" and, to a lesser extent, his "paths" and "landmarks". Following his own order, "paths" (1960: 49-62), which are often the principal elements in people's city maps, are the channels along which they move. They include streets, walkways, railway lines, rivers and so on. They have various spatial and functional characteristics, such as width or narrowness, dis/continuity, alignment, intersectionality, directional quality and concentration of use. "Edges" (62-66) – which I will discuss in more detail below – are those linear elements that are not path-like. They often constitute the boundaries between different areas. "Landmarks" (78-83) are external points of reference, "usually a rather simply defined physical object: building, sign, store or mountain" (48). They may be near or distant, large or small. They are useful for orientation, but their key feature is their "singularity" (78), and the extent to which they stand out from their background. In moving away from religious buildings to external boundaries as sites for study, I am not only shifting my gaze from the iconic to the mundane, but from "landmarks" to "edges".

This everyday urban infrastructure, though taken for granted, imposes its presence in order to regulate the flows and behaviours of citizens. Unlike waste (ostensibly worthless, spent and valueless), about which Lynch (1990) was writing at the time of his death in 1984, his "edges" are useful. Although they are bi-products of paths, private property and public spaces, they have value and consequences, both intended and unintended. They generate other places – insides and outsides, and something to lean or sit on. They interact with these other places, and are *entangled* (Hodder 2012) with the things and humans that gather around them.

What does it mean for these material boundaries to be entangled in this way? In explaining his conception of entanglement, Hodder focused on relations of dependence and dependency: "There is ... a dialectic relationship between dependence, often productive and enabling, and dependency, often constraining and limiting." (2012: 89) Humans depend on things; things depend on other things; things depend on humans; and humans depend on other humans (Hodder 2012: 88). In the case of Shakespeare's "play within a play", the two lovers, Pyramus and Thisby, were separated by the wall, but were nevertheless dependent on it – or on the chink within it – for communication with one another. Their relationship with the wall was one of dependence because it brought them together, but also of dependency, in so far as it limited their relationship with one another by reminding them of their distance.

Furthermore, the identity and role of “Wall” within the play was given character and substance by the lovers and their speech and actions. Such entanglements are variously understood and experienced from different standpoints. They have a tendency to be unstable, and they change over time as the dialectics of human/thing dependence/dependency changes.

In addition to their entanglement with proximate people and things, “edges” of the kind identified by Lynch are apprehended and imagined as commonplace boundaries. Edges, such as walls, gates and other surfaces tend to be taken-for-granted unless something occurs to draw attention to them. They are,

boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity: shores, railroad cuts, edges of development, walls... [They] may be barriers, more or less penetrable, which close one region off from another; or they may be seams, lines along which two regions are related and joined together. (Lynch 1960: 47)

This perception of them as barriers or seams hints at how they are used or imagined by those who come into contact with them, whether as custodians, planners, traders, visitors, artists, or simply passers-by. Barriers halt progress and prohibit crossings; they constitute a decisive break such that any sense of continuity between two regions is disrupted, even forgotten. Seams achieve the opposite, but not at the expense of the boundary itself. They invite reconnection across it, but do not erase it entirely. As Simmel noted in 1909, in his analysis of two other boundary objects, bridge and door, “We are at any moment – in the immediate or symbolic, in the physical or mental sense – beings who separate what is related and who relate what is separate” (Simmel in Kaerns 1994: 408). The bridge, he suggests, emphasises “unification” above separateness (1994: 409). The door emphasises the latter, more so even than a wall: “Exactly because the door can be opened, its being shut gives a feeling of being shut out, that is stronger than the feeling emanating from just a solid wall.” (1994: 409) It draws attention to discontinuity.

As cognitive and physical boundaries, all such boundary features (a) signal two regions or sides, often an inside and outside; (b) they either frame a site, thus drawing attention to it, or block or obscure it from view, thus making it invisible to those who pass by; and (c) they denote limits that have the capacity to be transgressed. Furthermore, some physical and social boundaries are held to be sacred (Knott 2008; Knott 2013). These are generally clearly

marked because of their associated prohibitions and rituals. The immediate thresholds of places of worship, for example, may entail the removal of shoes, covering of heads, washing of body parts and so on, and the boundary around holy ground may be denoted by signs, objects, and in some cases by stalls selling material for offering and souvenirs. These are not the commonplace edges intended by Lynch and to which I will refer below. Nevertheless, as we shall see in one case, the dynamism of urban space and the ingenuity of actors ensures that, through a process of entanglement over time, “edges” have the potential not only to become “nodes” or “landmarks”, but to be transformed into sacred boundaries.

### **Southwark and the Three Edges in Question**

The London Borough of Southwark, in which my three edges are situated, lies to the south of the river Thames. Its population of nearly 300,000 is ethnically diverse, with some 300 languages spoken (Southwark Council).<sup>2</sup> Half the population is white British, with the remainder from a variety of black and minority ethnic groups, with the largest being black African. Young people predominate, with nearly 60 per cent under 35 years old. The Borough is also religiously diverse, although Christians are in the majority, at 52.5 per cent of the population.<sup>3</sup> Mainstream Christian denominations (Church of England, Roman Catholicism, Methodism, the Baptist Church and so on) are joined by some 240 black majority churches, representing possibly the largest concentration of African Christianity outside Africa (Rogers 2013). This makes the Christian majority in Southwark quite different to the white mainstream Christian majority in most other parts of the UK.<sup>4</sup> Self-professed non-religious people constitute nearly 27 per cent, Muslims 8.5 per cent (twice the national average), with smaller percentages of Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and Sikhs. Southwark has a Multi-Faith Forum which brings together those of different religions and beliefs. The mainstream Christian denominations participate in Churches Together in South London, with some Evangelical groups collaborating in Southwark for Jesus. Southwark is historically and culturally rich, as the three case studies below will show.

**Figure 1 about here**

Figure 1: Southwark Cathedral amidst the transport network

To find the first of the three sites, you must alight from the underground at London Bridge Station, and head west towards Southwark Cathedral, turning to note the impenetrable steel

and glass skyscraper – the Shard – rising up behind you. It towers above Southwark’s office and apartment buildings, its many historic churches, its cultural institutions, bridges, stations and shopping areas. In terms of height and visual effect, the Shard has displaced other buildings to become Southwark’s iconic centrepiece, embodying the architectural role once played by the Cathedral. In seeking to achieve the developer’s vision of becoming a “vertical city”, it dominates too in terms of function, evoking both the practice and power of global capitalism.

Southwark Anglican Cathedral once held the position of architectural prominence within the area, combining this with spiritual power, in its role as mother church of Southwark Diocese. The oldest Cathedral in London and on the site of a 7<sup>th</sup> century church, it is close to London’s earliest river crossing and hemmed in by the Thames to the north, by railway lines above, a major road to the east, and a major food market to the south-west. Borough market, established by an act of Parliament in 1756 but dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, is a retail market selling food and drink from all over the world. The two places – church and market – are separated, and indeed brought together, by the Cathedral’s boundary wall. This is my first edge.

**Figure 2 about here**

Figure 2: Crossbones in the shadow of the Shard

The second lies to the south-west of the Cathedral, on Redcross Way on the other side of the railway tracks. As you make your way down the road you walk in parallel with the boundary fence (on your left) of land belonging to Transport for London. Before the road junction you reach a locked gate. You have arrived at Crossbones Graveyard. You can glimpse it through the ribbons and tokens that adorn the gate; behind it, the Shard looms. The gate is the second of my edges.

To reach the third, you must keep walking south, past Borough underground station to the corner of Harper Road and Dickens Square. There you cannot miss the Baitul Aziz Islamic Centre, set at an angle to the road, with its metal dome and coloured tiling. Although the recognisable edge here is the boundary fence, my focus will be on what until recently was disused ground behind the mosque, with my edge being the surface which separates what is above from what is below ground.

Figure 3 about here

Figure 3: Baitul Aziz Mosque at the corner of Dickens Square

### **The Boundary Wall: Formal Crossings and Fleeting Encounters**

In the quotation with which I began, *Pyramus and Thisby*, those ill-fated characters in the play within a play, by turns cursed and heaped praise on the wall that separated them but allowed them to glimpse and speak to one another. As “edges”, Lynch (1960) noted, walls may be barriers or seams, and more or less penetrable. Snout, cast in the role of Wall, suggests a further truth about such man-made boundaries – that they too are part of the action. They are entangled in relations of dependence and dependency (Hodder 2012).

The southern boundary wall enclosing the graveyard of Southwark Cathedral separates the church from the market, consecrated ground from the territory of secular consumption and exchange. It is the property of the Church of England, and overseen by the Cathedral Chapter. On the market side, it is bordered by stalls selling a variety of world foods (from English pasties and pies to Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin meals and snacks). On the Cathedral side of the wall is an earthen bank – once covered in grass – sloping down to a path with benches which runs in parallel to the wall.<sup>5</sup> There is an access gate to the west end of the wall. Until the summer of 2015, when the gate was closed to allow the renovation and replanting of the grounds, there was free access on most days of the year, allowing people to pass freely from the market to the churchyard and vice versa. Throughout the day, but especially at lunchtime, the wall, bank and benches provided somewhere for diners to sit once they had purchased food. The view from their temporary resting place took in the outer wall of the Cathedral nave and the main entrance to the south side, a large wooden cross, and some graves and important memorials.

Figure 4 about here

Figure 4: Diners relaxing in the Cathedral churchyard

When asked her opinion about people eating in the churchyard, one parishioner commented:

I think that's good. It brings people closer to the Cathedral and its providing something for the world at large; the people who work in the neighbourhood who might otherwise have to have their lunch at their office desk ... And for a lot of people who live in these surroundings, they've got no gardens ... [It] is part of us caring for other people. (Cathedral borderer, retired)<sup>6</sup>

This view, shared by some other parishioners, accords with the Cathedral Chapter's commitment to be an inclusive church. The Cathedral claims a congregation that reflects the social diversity of the neighbourhood and the capital more broadly in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation, and "is not only a place of worship but of hospitality to every kind of person: princes and paupers, prelates and prostitutes, poets, playwrights, prisoners and patients have all found refuge here" (Southwark Cathedral 2016). The open gate is a sign of such hospitality, but also a reminder of the power vested in the Cathedral as property owner. What is open can be closed, and this tension was expressed by another Cathedral worker.

[E]verybody feels they have a right to be there. Where in fact... they don't have a right to be there. By invitation, we have the gates open so they can come in but ... We could have the gates closed permanently. I think it wouldn't do us any good in PR terms. I don't think it would be desirable, but we could. It's our space, but I think we need to keep those boundaries ... We're about making special space. (Pastor Auxiliary, female, 60s)<sup>7</sup>

This worker refers to the complex dependence and dependencies implicated by the wall, its gate, the grounds it encloses and the two institutions it connects. The market's customers – and thus its producers and traders – rely on the hospitality of the Cathedral for respite and a place to sit away from the urban bustle; they depend on the physical properties of the wall and bank, and the openness of the gate. This enables the market to live up to its stated values, not only of quality and diversity, but also of connection: to be "a place where people come to connect, share food and awaken their senses." (Borough Market 2009) Many regulars who have become accustomed to eating lunch in the churchyard take the access for granted; they have become reliant on this routine and consider it a right rather than a gift (with all its associated obligations and dependencies). As the interviewee noted, however, the Cathedral too is constrained in this entanglement, as a result of its own commitment to hospitality and

the management of its public relations. The importance of this to the institution was highlighted by the Cathedral's Development Director (in a review of the renovated church grounds by a venue hire company).

I would like to encourage those in the creative industries with a keen eye on experiential marketing space to come down and see it, as well as, of course, party organisers researching locations for drinks and canapé receptions... [It is] most certainly a place-maker now with not just one but two wonderful outdoor areas at opposing compass points, the River side and Borough Market side – we are very lucky. (Rose Harding, Southwark Cathedral Development Director, quoted in Shane 2015)

Tidying up the churchyard and renting it out for events – which required closing it to visitors – is important not only for the Cathedral's public image, but for its economic sustainability: charging some users to enable free access for others has become a common strategy for London's cultural service providers.

Like Pyramus and Thisby, Cathedral and market connect across the wall that divides them, but with the access gate a constant reminder of the alternation of unification and separateness (Simmel in Kaerns 1994: 410). There are formal crossings: an annual civic service, for example, is hosted jointly by the Mayor of Southwark, the Cathedral and the market for those who live and work in the area. The 2015 event commemorated the 1,000 year presence of a local market in Southwark. Other joint events include Apple Day and a Christingle Service. Although it would be possible to sustain this longstanding reciprocal relationship without a “chink” in the boundary wall, it would be extremely difficult. Without its gate, the wall would be more barrier than seam. Given its height, it would block the Cathedral from public view (from the market side), making it far less likely that market goers and traders would ever visit it.

Walls and the land that abuts them are subject to planning and building regulations and to various laws and by-laws. From the 12<sup>th</sup> century in London, rules were in place for the height, width, shared costs and so on of party walls, including advice for the courts in settling disputes between neighbours (the Assize of Buildings, in London Record Society). Walls that are part of the domain of Anglican cathedrals and churches are also subject to Ecclesiastical

Law in so far as they form the boundaries of consecrated land (Jones 2012), in the Southwark case, the churchyard. However, walls regulate as well as being regulated. As O'Meara (2007) intimates, "walls do more than border the passageways. They form them. Were there no walls, there would be no paths and alleys". They regulate flows and – with the help of doors, gates and other breaches – facilitate crossings. They also mark and separate regions, in this case dividing consecrated from secular land. In these ways, they produce effects and help to shape and represent space to those who interact with them. In this sense, they are vibrant material in an open-ended and dynamic assemblage or entanglement (Hodder 2012). Time and space are interconnected here, with routine Cathedral/market relations and visitor encounters subject to changing laws, regulations and customs as well as the physical closing and opening of the gate.

When the Cathedral unlocks the gate in its wall, a vent is opened allowing workers, traders and visitors to flow from the secular market to the consecrated ground of the graveyard. No transgression is required as this is a permitted crossing point. It is nevertheless an opportunity for encounter – however unsought this may be – with the sacred, in its Anglican Christian form, with the external fabric and symbols of the Cathedral, and with its values of hospitality and openness. The possibility of encounter arises from fleeting interactions, "route-ines" as Vertovec (2015: 17) calls them. An invitation to cross the Cathedral threshold is made, if not accepted. Closing the gate inevitably risks creating a "corridor of dissociation" (Vertovec 2015: 17) in which the crossing is controlled and outsiders are only welcome when explicitly invited. Although the motivation for closure may not in itself arise from any negativity towards diverse others, in seeking to set apart the space and keep it special, the effect may be to limit encounters with the church and liberal Christianity more generally.

### **The Locked Gate: A Meeting Point for People, Objects and Memories**

In Southwark, residents and visitors, whatever their religious inclinations and ethnic heritage, come into passing contact with diverse Christianities and Christians as they go about their daily lives. Christian bodies of various persuasions – mainstream Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Baptist, Black-majority Evangelical, Pentecostal and Holiness, and new Christian expressions – make claims on public space in the Borough. Their signage adorns all kinds of purpose-built but more often recycled buildings, and their material representation – in dress, music, books, language and symbols – manifests in various times and places on the

street, in parks, stations, bookshops and other open places. Public events and processions may offer a deeper engagement, through the offering of a leaflet, a brief conversation, or a few minutes of focused observation. When Southwark's Anglican parishioners go out on the streets to Beat the Bounds, or get together with other local Christians for the Good Friday ecumenical Walk of Witness, their public walking, reading, prayer and performance (marking the bounds or carrying a heavy wooden cross) attract attention.<sup>8</sup> Setting out from the Cathedral, the procession makes one of its first stops at Crossbones Graveyard, at which prayers for the dead are said.

Accounts of Crossbones are plentiful, and most rehearse what is known, guessed and imagined about its history (e.g. Berns 2016; Crossbones Graveyard 2016; Harris 2013; Hausner, 2016; Slade 2013). Had you walked down Redcross Way before the 1990s, you would not have known it was there (it was closed to burials in 1884). Any signs would have directed you to London Transport (Transport for London as it is now), the owner of the disused land behind the boundary fence. In fact, it was when London Transport sought planning permission to erect an electricity substation on land for the new Jubilee underground line that a partial archaeological excavation was necessitated (Slade 2013: 51-52). This led to the discovery of a burial site, from which remains from 148 bodies were removed. Subsequent historical and archaeological research, with supporting evidence from John Stow's *A Survey of London* [1598], has shown that this was an unconsecrated burial site for paupers, many of whom were "single women", prostitutes in other words, who were forbidden the rites of the church. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the north part of Southwark had been designated a "Liberty", under the secular authority of the Bishop of Winchester (Slade 2013: 15; Crossbones Graveyard 2016), and had remained so for some five hundred years. Activities were permitted within the bounds of the "Liberty of the Clink" (so called after nearby Clink prison) that were forbidden within the city walls. It became known for its taverns, theatres, bear pits and brothels. Although the historical details are sparse, the archaeological evidence suggests that this site accommodated some 15,000 skeletons, including the syphilitic bodies of prostitutes, their unborn and young children, the plague dead and other paupers who died without the means for a Christian burial (Slade 52-53).

It was in the late 1990s that the burial ground came to public attention with a Museum of London exhibition of the archaeological finds, the publication by a local poet and playwright (John Constable) of *The Southwark Mysteries*, and the first Halloween ritual at the gate of the

disused site. Since that time the ground has remained in the property of Transport for London, and inaccessible to the public. Despite this, thousands of people have engaged with it, its myths and rituals, and with the “outcast dead” who are commemorated by a plaque and remembered in ribbons, tokens and testimonies tied to the boundary gate.<sup>9</sup> Although Bankside Open Spaces Trust signed a lease in 2014 to work with the Friends of Crossbones to develop an open garden on the site, the gate remains the focal point, drawing visitors on local walking tours and ghost tours, as well as participants to the regular vigils held there and volunteers who tend the space, organise the events and contribute to the making of Crossbones (Bankside Open Spaces Trust 2016; Berns 2016; Crossbones Graveyard 2016). John Constable – also known as John Crow – Crossbones luminary, ritual dramatist and urban shaman, calls visitors to renew the shrine and keep alive the memory of the outcast dead.<sup>10</sup>

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1991: 209) discussed transitional objects, such as mirrors and windows, and invited readers to consider a “door”:

Its surround makes a door into an object. In conjunction with their frames, doors attain the status of works, works of a kind not far removed from pictures and mirrors. Transitional, symbolic and functional, the object “door” serves to bring a space, the space of a “room”, say, or that of a street, to an end.

The Crossbones gate, forming as it does part of the edge that runs parallel with Redcross Way, shares the characteristics of Lefebvre’s “door”. It has become a “work”. It is transitional in so far as it marks the separation of two very different spaces of street and graveyard, the one of movement and flow, the other of depth and stasis, an underground of layered human remains now rich in cultural meaning and memory (see also Simmel in Kaern 1994). As a locked gate in an impenetrable boundary fence, its breaches are generally imaginative, though physical transgressions were made over a number of years by an “invisible gardener” who made stone sculptures, placed objects, pruned bushes and tended the site and the bones emerging from the eroding surface (Slade 2013: 34-37). The gate, itself symbolic, permits glimpses of the graveyard beyond, and together they constitute both shrine and portal to an unrecorded past and the spirit world of the outcast dead.

Figure 5 about here

Figure 5: The gate with the graveyard beyond

The gate gathers people, spirits and objects. Through drama, ritual and imagination, it unlocks the memories not only of the outcast dead of the past but those who died more recently as outsiders (sex workers, asylum seekers, those who took their own lives) (Berns 2016; Hausner 2016). It is considered to be a healing place, where once closed pathways of memory are opened up; it is also a door to the next world (see interviews with Lisa and Jen, in Harris 2013: 166). The gate, whilst remaining an “edge”, has been transformed into both a “landmark” and “node” (Lynch 1960), connecting times and lives. It allows imaginative encounters with the dead as well as the living. A new spiritual space on both the ecumenical/interfaith route and the tourist trail, it is to some degree routinized whilst its practitioners simultaneously resist such an appropriation (Berns 2016; Harris 2013).

An assemblage may have “components working to stabilize its identity as well as components forcing it to change, or even transforming it into a different assemblage” (DeLanda 2006: 12; cf. Hodder 2012). They may encourage homogenization and territorialization, or the reverse. The locked gate on Redcross Way, from the 1990s onwards, during which it has gathered together assorted people, things, ideas and practices, has been the focus of these twin drives towards de/stabilization. Various human actors have sought to give it substance and ensure its longevity, whilst the graveyard has continued to represent processes of decay and death (Berns 2016). The outcast dead themselves “embody” both tendencies: they require naming and remembrance and yet seem to speak of other worlds, of the past and of spirits.

What does this edge allow, what is gathered together by this potent boundary? Before the 1990s, it was unnoticed, unknown, disused, the fence and gate an impenetrable border. Since then, diverse objects – things chosen for their symbolic or sacred value by visitors – have accumulated, from the statue of Red Cross Mary, to the bones which continue to emerge from the soil and the photographs of those who have died and are lovingly remembered (Crossbones Graveyard 2016). They are imaginatively drawn together by John Constable in a ritual bricolage of elements from Native Shamanic, Christian, Tibetan Buddhist, New Age and popular Mexican performance and practice (Hausner, 2016). Diverse people pass by or assemble at the gate, with remembrance, ritual or tourism in mind. Their encounters with one

another may well be brief, but the memory of the place is likely to linger for longer, and to be accompanied by unsought thoughts and emotions.

### **Waste Ground: An Opportunity for Disclosure and New Relationships**

Is the ground an edge; is it part of a city's infrastructure? Or is it only as "path", as part of the transport network, or as a surface below which pipes, cables and other underground systems run that it can be understood as such? And what about waste or disused ground? Has it passed from being a useful foundation to something worthless, spent and valueless for human purpose (Lynch 1990)? As Crossbones revealed, however, what was once wasteland owned by Transport for London was transformed through ritual process and commercial and legal negotiations into a sacred place and memorial garden; from a mundane and unnoticed "edge" to a significant "landmark".

In this third case, I will show how ground ripe for physical redevelopment became a site for the unexpected generation of new relationships that cut across social boundaries.

In 2006, the purpose-built Baitul Aziz Islamic Centre was opened on the corner of Harper Road and Dickens Square in Southwark, replacing a smaller, temporary mosque on the same site. Despite the new building catering for some 2,500 people, it was not long before prayer mats were being laid down in the grounds and car park for Friday prayers and festivals. Planning permission obtained prior to 2006 made provision for the building of an extension on ground behind the new mosque, but only subject to an archaeological excavation being carried out.

The opportunity afforded by such a survey for breaking through the surface and reconnecting Southwark past and present is something this case study has in common with the previous one, but there the similarity ends. The spatial regime of the Baitul Aziz mosque, whilst being regulated by the same planning framework as Crossbones, was subject to different conditions because of its status as a place of worship (Vásquez and Knott 2014). Moreover, it was impacted by other forces, driven by identity politics, Islamophobia and popular anxieties about migration and extremism.

Unlike Transport for London, a publicly funded body, how was the Islamic Centre, a charitable trust financed largely by donations, to pay for a legally-required archaeological survey? The company responsible for carrying out such excavations, Pre-Construct Archaeology (PCA), resolved the problem by drawing on the human capital of the Islamic Centre. Volunteers from the community, with some willing Muslims from elsewhere in London, were trained and then helped to dig the site between November 2013 and February 2014 (Maloney 2014). This was an innovative solution which gained positive endorsement from both sides. PCA benefitted from diversifying “community archaeology”, known to be largely white and middle class, and no doubt by fulfilling its diversity targets. The Islamic Centre trustees and local Muslims benefitted by reducing the cost of their building extension and by finding new ways to engage with the wider public.

Figure 6 about here

Figure 6: Looking out from the mosque to the excavated site

A blog was established to record the work and the views of those involved (Pre-Construct Archaeology 2014). Here, Ahmed Uddin, a Centre trustee, explains his motivation for being involved:

I’m actually from around here ... My Dad, my brothers, my uncles, they all worship at this mosque. Consequently, my affiliation to this mosque is, principally, through worship and then through family ties, etc. The reason for my involvement is in the way of Allah, as a form of worship, because when you undertake to do something for the mosque, for the community at large, it’s something that you are doing in the name of the religion, Allah ... (Uddin 2013).

For Ahmed, it was spiritual, communal and familial obligation and service, rather than an interest in local history or archaeological excavation that drove his involvement.

After the survey had been completed, the finds were displayed in a Museum of London exhibition (*Dickens Square: Great Excavations*), and the Islamic Centre held an Open Day, to bring local people into the Centre to see what had been discovered. According to the Marketing and PR Manager of PCA,

The trustees and members... expressed their fervent wish to engage with their neighbours and the local community at large. They very much wanted to break down any barriers and to show that the mosque was a place of learning and worship with a welcome for everyone. (Maloney 2014)

This was endorsed by the volunteers themselves, not least because of the climate of fear in which they had found themselves living since 9/11. As Ahmed Uddin remarked, “it only takes one bad headline to whip up fear for a week. That’s why we’ve talked about an Open Day for people to come to the site and to the mosque, to hear about the religion and our backgrounds,” as well as about the project and the finds (Uddin 2013). He imagined a community celebration: “I remember street parties in 1977 when I was a kid and lived in Vauxhall and they were great. The locals they’ll come, they’ll see they’ll listen and they’ll see we’re ordinary people, not people planning the next atrocity!” (Ibid)

The Open Day – the first of several “Tea and Tour” events – was attended by community members, local people and the press. Neighbours in particular valued the opportunity to see inside the mosque, a building they had only previously experienced from the outside (London SE1 2015). Local media too produced positive and enthusiastic coverage, with stories about the unusual partnership between professionals and Muslim volunteers, and information about the finds, which included four Roman inhumations (including a child), with grave goods and the remains of a wooden coffin, three mid-18<sup>th</sup> century burials of whole cattle probably infected with rinderpest disease, and two late 18<sup>th</sup> century wells containing a variety of household goods (London SE1 2015).

It may appear to be stretching a point to derive this compelling story of the entanglement of diverse people and things from a piece of waste land, a surface awaiting a use, separating the world of human activity above ground from the silent and unknown darkness below. But just as Wall had a role to play in the drama of Pyramus and Thisby, so the ground was part of the drama in this one. Ground – in this case, land for development in the hands of a religious community – is subject to regulation and is dependent on planning decisions made by local authorities. Furthermore, this particular ground is within an Archaeological Priority Area: the likelihood of remains being found is high, and excavation is therefore required. So, in order to develop its own property and extend the mosque, the Baitul Aziz Trust found itself in a network of dependent relations (Hodder 2012) with Southwark Council and the heritage

company, PCA. However, the involvement of Muslim volunteers and the objects that were excavated generated the possibility of opening up and connecting outwards to local non-Muslims, to whom the mosque, its worshippers and their activities appeared impenetrable, mysterious and even frightening.

In places of “commonplace diversity” (Wessendorf, 2014), people briefly encounter one another without generally having much opportunity to get beyond superficial interactions. Whilst such encounters are valuable for normalizing everyday multi-cultures and generating good relations, from time to time occasions arise when people are able to break through the apparent barriers – physical, social and mental – that separate them from others. Thus it was that, as a result of their cooperation with PCA, local Muslims were able to make the best of the opportunity afforded by the requirements of the planning process to open their doors, show that they were “ordinary people”, and thus challenge media-generated stereotypes.

Could this tale could not have been told from a different perspective, with the mosque, its congregation, Dickens Square, community archaeology or the found objects as its starting point? What special claim did the ground have for being the focus? As an “edge”, in Lynch’s terms, it is a boundary “between two phases”, and – in this case – it transitioned from being a barrier to a seam. Previously, as a barrier, what was beneath ground was closed off from what was above it; once the site had been dug, the two regions above and below were reconnected. Humans (archaeologists, volunteers, visitors, and even the earlier inhabitants of the site) and things (finds, the mosque and its material culture) were disclosed to one another and brought into new relationships, both social and imaginative. Through the breaching of *terra firma*, local Muslims and their mosque became temporally connected to the unravelling saga of historical Southwark (Southwark Council 2016), inhabiting shared physical and narrative space with Roman settlers, Chaucer’s pilgrims, Shakespeare and his audiences, the Pilgrim Fathers, Charles Dickens, his characters and readers, and the prisoners of Southwark’s many gaols. The ground was where this process began, and its breach was what made the disclosure and new relationships possible.

### **Infrastructure and Diversity: Edges, Openings and Encounters**

These three edges – boundary wall, locked gate and waste ground – all part of the built infrastructure of Southwark, have become sites of interaction and change. They have fulfilled

their role as boundaries, and have transitioned variously from barriers to seams or vice versa, either separating and closing off social spaces from one another or opening them up and reconnecting them. Whilst all three have gathered together diverse people and things, the entanglements they have generated, their dependences and dependencies have differed. Focusing in more closely, three distinctive spatio-temporal openings may be identified, leading to different types of encounter.

“Edges”, according to Lynch (1960: 47), constitute breaks in continuity and are more or less penetrable. Over many centuries, the Cathedral boundary wall had separated church from market, its gate enabling or disabling the flow of people and goods between the two. This kind of opening is best described as a *vent*. The locked gate at Crossbones was quite different: it was impenetrable to all but human gaze and imagination. It had become a *portal* between worlds, connecting living and dead, past, present and future. The third edge, a disused surface awaiting development behind a mosque, was an “open and shut case”, a *hole*, the digging of which generated new human-object and human-human relationships, albeit temporary in nature.

Vents, portals and holes are different types of spatio-temporal opening. A vent allows something to flow through or pass out; over time it may become subject to closure or blockage. A portal is a “work” in its own right (Lefebvre 1991), a grand entrance often to a special or sacred site or to another world. Access – whether physical, virtual, visual or spiritual – may be ritually managed. The term “hole” may signal two different types, the first an opening *through* something (a tunnel or passageway), and the second, an opening *into* something (a cave or hollow). It is in this second sense that it is used here. A *hole* is an opening into the ground, whether permanent or temporary; in the case of an archaeological dig, one that cuts through layers of soil to connect past and present. Because of their particular characteristics, these three types of spatio-temporal opening permit different relationships and patterns of encounter.

As a *vent*, the gate in the Cathedral’s wall allowed large numbers of people to flow through into the space of the churchyard, forcing them to rub along together. The wall further permitted temporary respite and fleeting opportunities for social intercourse and an encounter with the material presence of the church (and sometimes its religious representatives). The regulation of this activity by the church was supplemented by an open invitation to cross the

threshold. With the Cathedral dedicated to hospitality, and the market to connecting people to and through their senses – and both committed to diversity – it is fair to say that the gate facilitated commonplace multicultural contacts, with the potential for deeper engagement on offer. With the Cathedral having rights over both vent and edge, however, such encounters were dependent on its decisions and goodwill.

The history, representation and management of Crossbones remain highly contested. In legal terms, the site belonged to Transport for London, with part of the land leased in 2014 to Bankside Open Spaces Trust, in collaboration with the Friends of Crossbones, for a “meanwhile garden” (Berns 2016). But, despite issues of proprietorship, its edge and locked gate remained a potent boundary. On “the other side”, the burial ground and the “outcast dead” were the focus of an imaginary and sensory surplus for visitors whose relationships with the dead took material form in left objects and tokens. This opening is best described as a *portal* because the gate has been “fabricated” (Meyer 2012: 22) as a sacred boundary between worlds, separating the mundane here-and-now from a quite different temporality that is experienced variously as historical past, afterlife or spirit world, or all three. For those who passed by on tourist trails, the encounter was limited, with this site only one among many. But this was no ordinary opening: for those who attended vigils and cared for Crossbones as volunteers, the relationships – with living and dead people and diverse sacred things – were transformative.

What happened at the Baitul Aziz Islamic Centre might best be described as a hiatus, or break in the normal pattern of dissociation between Muslim worshippers and outsiders. Despite the readiness of local Muslims to engage with local people and challenge negative stereotypes, openings were needed to bring this about and to allow normally hard and fast barriers to be breached. The need to fulfil the legal requirement for an archaeological survey provided such an occasion.

*Holes* are associated with confinement and even closure, but they may also intensify action, experience and relationships. When the archaeological surveyors came up with the idea of reducing the cost of the work by using Muslim volunteers, the way was cleared for the site to be excavated. The activity was time-limited, the ground only opened up for a few weeks, during which close relationships developed between professionals and volunteers. The subsequent Open Day allowed local people to cross the threshold of an otherwise

intimidating religious building and to come into meaningful contact with their Muslim neighbours, themselves ethnically diverse. And that was it: the hole was filled in again. But some things had changed: the Islamic Centre could proceed to build its mosque extension; volunteers had gained experience and training in a new field; a company had diversified the practice of community archaeology; and neighbours from different backgrounds had had a chance to meet and talk. Furthermore, local Muslims and their mosque ensured their place in the historical narrative of diversity in Southwark, connected through the hole's material remains to earlier populations. Despite the dependencies faced by minorities as they subject themselves to the planning regime and compete for space in London's overcrowded, competitive and expensive built environment, opportunities nevertheless arise for religious place-making that simultaneously permit the outward expression of identity and values.

## **Conclusion**

My aim in this article has been to consider taken-for-granted edges in the built environment, and the entanglements and encounters that occur, particularly when they are breached. Religious landmarks, despite a discourse of openness, are hard to enter; assumptions about religious identities, communities and boundaries make encounters difficult to initiate. What if we refocus instead on the periphery rather than the centre, on edges like walls, gates and surfaces rather than landmarks? They are the subjects of everyday routines, forces and practices, and act variously as barriers or seams that separate or entangle places, people and things, in time as well as space. But, however unremarkable they seem, they are not just passive sites that permit human-to-human interactions. Rather, they participate in complex relations of dependence and dependency in which people and things productively support and rely on, or limit and constrain one another.

In all of the cases I examined, the boundaries in question were penetrated. Whilst impermeable edges may also invite creativity (graffiti, for example) or new relationships (at designated junctions or signs), crossings or access points permit people, objects, ideas and even spiritual substances to pass through. Such transitions allow things to be (re)assembled and (re)connected. Furthermore, different spatio-temporal openings – vents, portals and holes – make possible encounters and other effects in accordance with their characteristics and duration. Vents, which allow the flow-through of people and rarely inhibit movement, may be less likely than holes, in which people and things are temporarily enclosed and bound

together, to lead to meaningful contact, albeit brief. And portals, which mark a significant threshold, announce the special, even dangerous nature of what is on “the other side” and its power to transform people and their human, material and spiritual relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Research was conducted in Southwark between April 2014 and December 2015. Sites were selected as part of a larger study of religious iconography in Amsterdam, Berlin and London (Iconic Religion 2016). Documentary research and participant observation were undertaken by Steph Berns and Kim Knott; semi-structured interviews were conducted by Berns (with participants, leaders and professionals) who also maintained a photographic record.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200088/southwarks\\_facts\\_and\\_figures](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200088/southwarks_facts_and_figures), accessed 17 January 2016.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200559/public\\_sector\\_equality\\_duty/3859/religion\\_and\\_belief](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200559/public_sector_equality_duty/3859/religion_and_belief), accessed 17 January 2016.

<sup>4</sup> At the time of the population census of 2011, the Christian majority in England and Wales was 59.3 per cent, 25.1 per cent “no religion”, 4.8 per cent Muslim. Hindus, Sikhs, Jews and Buddhists and other religions together made up about 4 per cent, with the remainder “not stated” (Office for National Statistics 2012).

<sup>5</sup> This describes the situation prior to the renovation of the grounds, in the summer of 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Interview conducted by Steph Berns.

<sup>7</sup> Interview conducted by Steph Berns.

<sup>8</sup> “Beating the Bounds” is a custom dating back to the Anglo-Saxon period in England in which clergy and parishioners walk the boundaries of the parish to mark and show the extent of parish jurisdiction.

<sup>9</sup> The plaque reads: “Cross Bones Graveyard. In medieval times, this was an unconsecrated graveyard for prostitutes or ‘Winchester Geese’. By the 18th century, it had become a paupers’ burial ground, which closed in 1853. Here, local people have created a memorial shrine. The Outcast Dead. RIP.”

<sup>10</sup> For further information about John Constable, see “John Constable” and “John Crow”, in Crossbones Graveyard (2016).

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