# MOVEMENT BEHAVIOUR, SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND SPATIAL COGNITION IN SPACES OF CONSUMPTION:
## the case of Camden Market

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## Abstract

In this paper spaces of consumption are considered to be spaces of fundamental value in the formation of social and cognitive interfaces. The case of Camden Market in London is an assemblage of miscellaneous markets, which forms an amalgam of multiple markets. The movement behaviour of the users is being influenced by the differences in spatial configurations of the markets, the kinds and the distributions of goods, and the cognitive dimension attributed by space that allow people to navigate through the stalls. The paper brings to discussion, through simplified sketches, data gathered through observations on the movement patterns and space syntax analysis, the relationship between movement behaviour and the spatial patterns of the Market. In seeking the mechanisms that affect the movement patterns in Camden Market, the study brings into focus – at a second level – the relationship between Cage and Electric Ballroom. It is concluded that each market exhibits distinct movement patterns attributed to different geometric rules that underlie each structure. The cultural and social rules derived from the social aspect of the goods suggest also patterns of movement, while the cognitive mechanisms that each user recalls in order to remember or discover specific commodities are subjects of inevitable invariance.

## Introduction

One of the most primitive and fundamental social interfaces is the trade of goods, because it reveals the immediate linkage between the social and economic aspects of a society. In this study, consumption is interpreted as "a key characteristic of modernity" (Miller et al., 1998, p.3), which integrates and ties to *spaces* and *places* [i]. The consumption spaces are not merely considered as back-drops, but as spaces with their own properties which are able to intervene in the construction of difference. In other words, the spaces of consumption are seen as playgrounds of interpretation and construction of self and identity (Willis 1991; Nava 1992).

Camden Market in London is a place where the consumer objects (Baudrillard, 1996) have crucial roles in producing the singular person and space. The "singularities" [ii] act within a complex of markets, which

is an amalgam of heterogeneous markets. In this environment, the singularities cognise, occupy and explore space in a different way.

The paper presents a theoretical background of the study, diagrams of the movement patterns, and then a series of findings of space syntax research regarding the spaces of the markets. At a second level, the study focuses on two markets: Cage and Electric Ballroom, as they appear to have significant differences despite their geographical adjacency.

## Literature Review

### *The Concept of Consumption*

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Modern consumption studies, which had identified the practice of consumption as a critical issue of everyday life, have taken diverse approaches to an almost bewildering set of topics, all set within number of disciplinary frames (Miller, 1995).

Consumption is also viewed as a system of exchange by Jean Baudrillard (1998). To him, the sphere of consumption is a mode of discourse, a language (also following Levi-Strauss consumption is treated as a kinship system).

In the view that follows the work of Mary Douglas, the rationality of consumer, emerges from seeing consumption as "a choice not just between different kinds of goods but between kinds of relationship" (Douglas, 1997, p.110). From an anthropological point of view, Douglas considers the body as a medium of communication constructing a direct relationship of spatial arrangements and social structure (Douglas, 1971, 1978).

Consumption is also interpreted as a "key characteristic of modernity" (Miller et al., 1998, p.3). To Walter Benjamin, the city offers the boundaries and thresholds that fracture modern experience. For Benjamin, mystification and emancipation were embodied in his cult-hero - epitomised by the poet Charles Baudelaire - the flâneur, who occupied the Parisian streets. This threshold figure is an individual, a singularity, who is not yet part of the bourgeoisie and who moves through the crowds found in the city, observing while walking, blushing "before the eyes of no one" (Benjamin, 1999a, p. 105) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1:**

*Moving through the crowds, observing. The dominance of the gaze. What is seen without being an active participant in the crowd. Camden The entrance of Electric Ballroom, Camden Market (drawn on 15/01/06)*



### *The Users of Space ["inhabitants and visitors"]*

In Camden Market, different groups of people occupy the spaces for different purposes. The spaces inside and outside the spatial configurations of the markets express the various relationships and

interactions that take place. Following Hanson's, Hillier's and Peponis 's classification for the users of space, it can be stated that "inhabitants" are those who are embedded in the spatial layout, the stallholders, who are directly involved in trading. Going further, "inhabitants" are also the flâneurs (or "drifters") who tend to occupy the streets and are moving through the crowds, observing, but not necessarily consuming [iii]. On the other hand, there are the "visitors", the consumers or tourists, that have a temporal control of the place and whose identities are "subordinated to those of the inhabitants" (Hillier, 1996a, p. 251).

## *The Six Markets*

Camden Market is a collection of six different markets, with different spatial configurations, all adjacent to the main Camden High Street: Camden Lock, Camden Stables, Camden Canal, Camden Market (Cage) , Inverness St. Market and Electric Ballroom [iv].

From simplified sketches (Figure 2) – diagrams – of the basic movement patterns inside each market, it can be seen that space of movement and spatial layout is highly differentiated from market to market.

*Figure 2:*

*Simplified sketches – diagrams of movement patterns of the markets through observation. The stalls are also displayed*



Camden (Buck St.) - the Cage

Electric Ballroom

Inverness Street

Camden Lock

Camden Stables

Camden Canal
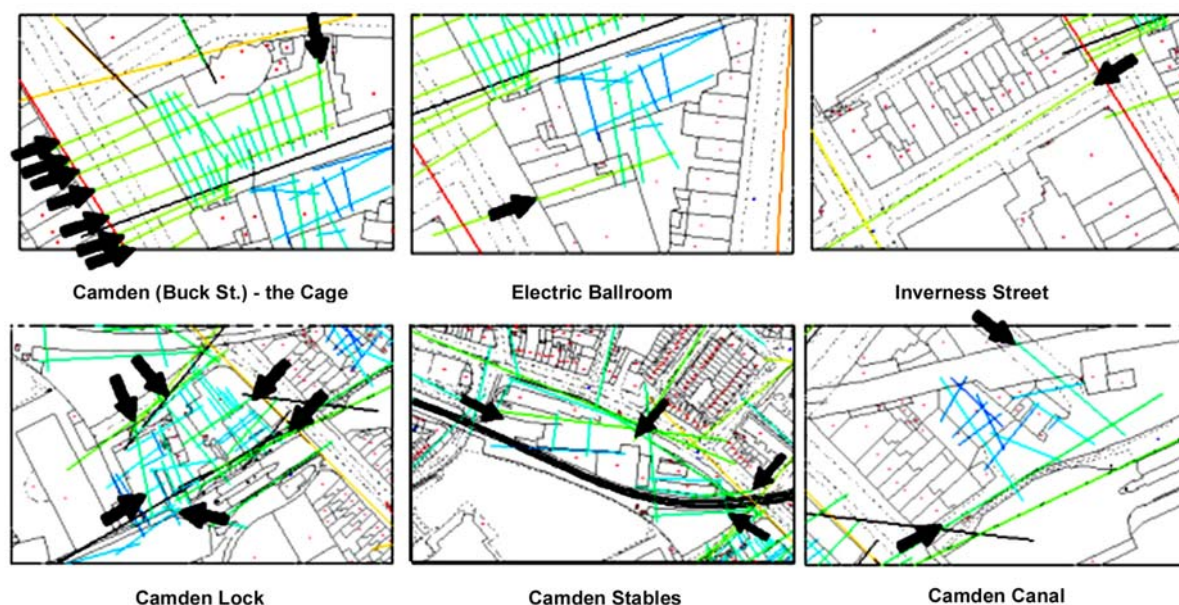
## The Spatial Patterns of the Markets

The markets are dispersed on either side of Camden High Street; they have different spatial configuration [v], different number of entrances, stairs, connection to the main movement lines and their functions are spatialised differently.

Spatial analysis with space syntax reveals that markets have different geometrical structure (Table 1). In Cage, we may distinguish two different grids, one that consists of very long axial lines, directly connected to the main high street and a secondary network of shorter lines (almost perpendicular to the major one) that connects all spaces of the inner part of the structure. It is the market with the second larger number of lines: 26. Its spatial configuration seems to encourage an easy wayfinding [vi]. For a user of Cage, the linearity of the routes appears to be the strongest element that determines the spatial cognition [vii] of this environment. The way people cognise space inside the Cage can be considered similar to the way individuals make route choices at consecutive road junctions within a system of parallel and perpendicular roads. As the angular deviation from the straight line is

minimal, people develop a robust knowledge of the grid they are traversing.

| Markets | Nr of lines | IntRN | IntR3 | Intelligibility | Synergy |
|---------|-------------|-------|-------|-----------------|---------|
| Camden Lock | 37 | 3.0129 | -1.7426 | 0.6274 | 0.6325 |
| Camden Stables | 13 | 4.0058 | -3.3927 | 0.7304 | 0.7778 |
| Camden Canal | 14 | 2.5996 | -1.2891 | 0.6964 | 0.6157 |
| Camden Market (cage) | 26 | 2.9053 | -1.8108 | 0.6101 | 0.7693 |
| Inverness Street | 1 | 3.7337 | -3.8600 | – | – |
| Electric Ballroom | 13 | 2.5147 | -1.0008 | 0.7157 | 0.7541 |

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***Table 1:***

*Number of lines and values of IntRN, IntR3, Intelligibility and Synergy for all markets (the values of the main roads are included)*

***Figure 3:***

*Axial break-ups showing Global Integration for all markets and circulation patterns (including entrances that are indicated by arrows)*



**Camden Stables**

**Electric Ballroom**

**Camden Canal**

**Camden Lock**

**Inverness Street**

**Camden Market (Cage)**
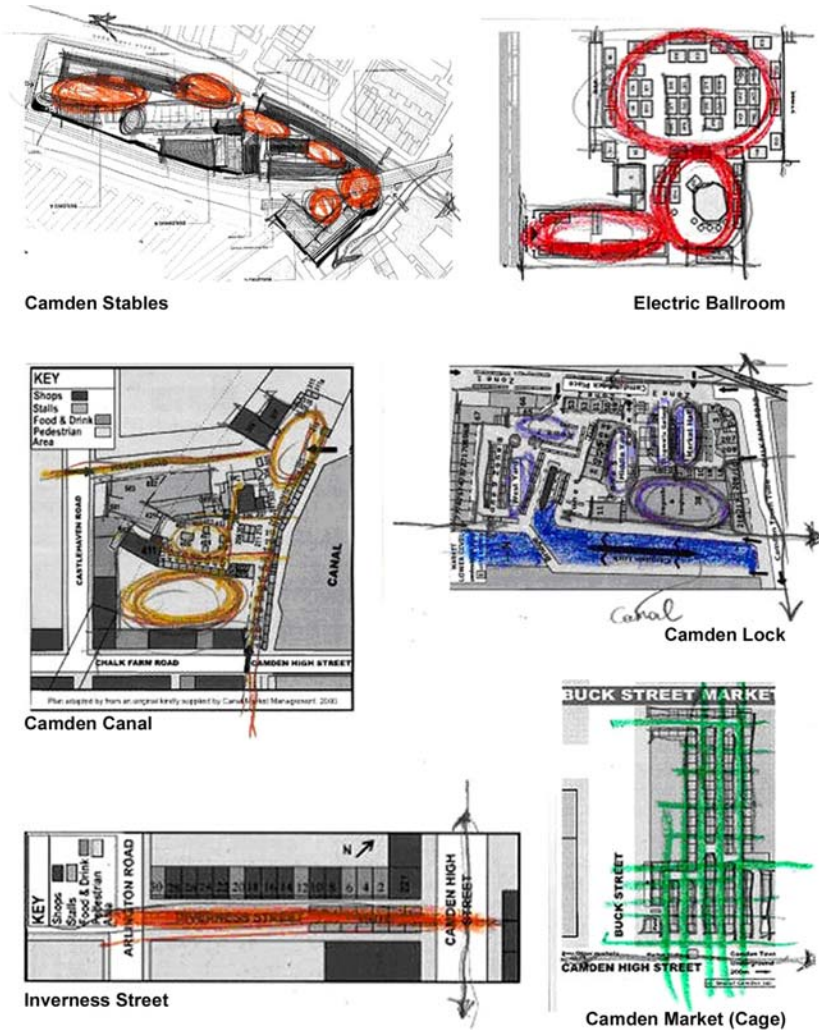
In Electric Ballroom we find lines of various lengths and angles of incidence (13 lines in total). The geometrical configuration encourages a better understanding of space, which makes the market an intelligible [viii] space to navigate through it. The latter can be explained – to some extend – not only by the position of the stalls (they appear in clusters and not in rows), but because of the existence of "landmarks" – such as a stage, several loud speakers, monitor systems and amplifiers, all parts of the music equipment [ix].

Inverness Street Market has the strong geometrical feature of the line. It is a street market where there is a direct access from Camden High Street.

The geometric pattern of Camden Lock seems more complicated. There are no primary and secondary networks and it is the market with the largest number of lines: 37. In Camden Lock there is a hierarchy of "centres" and "subcentres" that are diffused through the overall structure. Movement patterns in different parts of the market's network are systematically influenced by the spatial configuration of the network itself (Hillier et al., 1993). It is a polycentric, intelligible system with a lot of entrances, stairs, different levels and three internal yards that are surrounded by stalls with different types of goods.

In Camden Stables there has been an "elementary process of urban growth" (Hillier, 1996a Ch. 9). The configuration of this market (is the most intelligible) implies again a whole hierarchy of "centres" and "subcentres", but in a scale dissimilar to the scale of Camden Lock. Since 1854, the growth of Stables could be regarded as the growth of a small city, governed by spatial laws. Global integration reveals that in Stables a whole series of long, sometimes wandering routes picked out mostly but not all radial and most with significant "subcentres" along their length.

Finally, Camden Canal with al low number of lines – 14 – has a structure similar to Electric Ballroom in terms of number and distribution of lines. The distribution of lines of incidence plays a key role in making the market an intelligible system.

## The Spatial Patterns of the Goods

Almost all goods acquire value that goes beyond their functional value, through attached symbolic or cultural meaning at either a social or an individual level (McCracken, 1988). The selection of new objects "seems to embody two kinds of personal statement depending on whether they are intended for personal use or for gifting to others" (Penn, 1988, p.29). Aggregation of a particular retail function allows the market to become an attractor for those consuming for that class of goods. Types (Table 2), values, quality and the way that are being displayed (position of the stalls) attract people of different cultures, age, ethnicities, tastes and lifestyles who create distinctive movement patterns. Thus, the goods often become the stimuli for movement or stasis [x] (Figure 2).

*Table 2:*

*Table that highlights the types of goods that are being displayed in all Markets*

| Markets | Goods | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Clothing / Accessories | Clothing New | Clothing Second Hand | Clothing Vintage | Audio / Visual | Food / Take-away | Food / Uncooked | Food / Sit-in | Household Goods | Ethnic | Workshops |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Camden Lock | ● | ● | | | ● | ● | | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Camden Stables | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Camden Canal | ● | ● | | ● | ● | ● | | ● | | ● | |
| Camden Market (Cage) | ● | ● | | ● | ● | ● | | | | ● | |
| Inverness Street | ● | ● | | | | | ● | | | ● | |
| Electric Ballroom | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | | | | |

## Decoding Camden Market (Cage) and Electric Ballroom

At a second level of analysis, a comparison of the two markets, Cage and Electric Ballroom could illustrate, in a more elaborate way, the mechanisms that differentiate movement behaviour and spatial cognition [x] while navigate through the markets.

These markets are chosen not only because the space that occupy is more or less the same, but also because they appear to have significant differences despite their geographical adjacency: a) they have different geometrical structures b) they differentiate syntactically (deep structure versus shallow structure) c) Electric Ballroom is indoors while Cage is an outdoors market, which means that they emerge in a different way in the urban fabric d) although they are located in the same urban block, the cognitive map that most visitors have constructed for Camden Market doesn't include both.

Analysing the results from personal observations (static snapshots, following people and movement traces), it is highlighted that in the two markets "Inhabitants" and "Visitors" of different ages are distributed differently. In Cage, space is mostly occupied by adult females (37.26%), followed by adult males (25.86%), who are mainly in motion, while Electric Ballroom is mostly occupied by adolescents (30.43%) who are standing in the most segregated places.

Furthermore, in Cage the types of goods that are being displayed are very similar to each other (clothing/accessories), and they are distributed within the orthogonal grid that the stalls create. Wayfinding is even more difficult due to lack of "landmarks" for the users. In Electric Ballroom the clustered stalls (with second-hand, hand-made and vintage clothing) seem to create space for co-presence, social interaction and communication.

Visibility Graph Analysis shows that in Cage there is neither a dominant movement pattern, nor a visual "attractor" (or obstructor) as all routes of both primary and secondary network are equally visually integrated. When people enter in Electric Ballroom, they experience a sequential revealing of spaces from the exterior to the core of the system. As there is virtually no visual connection with the outside world (there are few steps before entering the main corridor of the market which is in a lower level with the rest of the market), the main space of Electric Ballroom is visually disconnected from the other markets, with a highly integrated core.

## Conclusion: The Amalgam of Different Syntaxes

The present study in Camden Market suggests that the markets cannot be considered as one single complex; the interface of consumption in each of the markets is demonstrated in a unique way, creating a cluster, an amalgam.

To begin with, each Market exhibits distinct movement patterns attributed to different geometric rules that underlie each structure. There are spatial configurations that engender a nonlinear transition from one space to another (Stables Market, Camden Lock, Electric Ballroom, Camden Canal), while others provoke linear routes that are formed by the arrangement of the stalls (Cage, Inverness Street Market).

On the other hand, the cultural and social rules derived from the social aspect of the goods suggest also patterns of movement, but in a manner distinct from those demonstrated earlier. The consumer objects that hold specific social meaning attract specific identities or they create new identities. The goods affect the construction and reproduction of contemporary social structures, as they embody symbolic or cultural meaning. Each market constructs a search interface and then, an interface of exchange, constructing its own syntax; a system of signs through which it advertises itself to different sub-groups within the society and attracts specific groups of people.

Finally, the way that spatial pattern is understood by people differs; therefore, the cognitive mechanisms that each walker recalls in order

to remember or discover specific commodities are subjects of inevitable invariance. The choice of a market and the choice of a route by an inhabitant depend partly on the cognitive landscape and partly on the language of consumption (social underlying rules). On the other hand, the decision making of a visitor depends partly on a simplified cognitive diagram that constructs as an ad hoc [xi] solution to find the way, and partly on the decisions of other visitors, as some routes seem more attractive than others because of high flow of movement.

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i. Michel de Certeau (1986), in his work on stories, makes a distinction between "*places*"(organised, planned and policed) and "*spaces*" (determined by actions of historical subjects, temporal, ephemeral, full of meaning). In the view that follows the work of Bill Hillier and his work *Space is the Machine, "*Places are not local things. They are moments in large-scale things, the large-scale things we call cities. Places do not make cities. It is cities that make places" (Hillier, 1996a, p. 151).

ii. The notion of singularity is used here as "a heterogeneous condition, as a process which differs from individual expression in that it involves the possibility of repetition". (Eisenman, 1993, p. 25) Eisenman follows the French philosopher G. Deleuze, who urges that "the process of signification or representation contains at least the potential of (ontological) violence where 'being different' becomes an aspect of individualisation—or becoming singular" (Deleuze, 1994).

iii. In this study, consumption is seen in a different way from the necessity of shopping. Consumption is a whole experience that entails euphoria due to the "spectacles" that one might witness while being in a multi-cultural space of a market. It is not without meaning that in this study it is used the verb "to consume" instead "to shop".

iv. All the markets are open during weekend; this is why observations took place during two weekends: 25-26/02/2006 and 4-5/03/2006.

v. The concept of "spatial configuration" in space syntax theory concerns relations which take into account other relations in a complex (Hillier, 1996).

vi. "One definition that could be created is that wayfinding is the act of travelling to a destination by a continuous, recursive process of making route-choices whilst evaluating previous spatial decisions against constant cognition of the environment" (Conroy Dalton, 2001, Chapter 2, p.26).

vii. Spatial cognition concerns "the study of knowledge and beliefs about spatial properties of objects and events in the world. Cognition is about knowledge: its acquisition, storage and retrieval, manipulation and use" (Montello 2001, p.14771). Spatial knowledge changes over time, through processes of learning and development. The acquisition, the development and the application of knowledge establish different movement behaviour, and therefore discrete approach in a wayfinding task.

viii. In space syntax "intelligibility" measures on a scale from 0 to 1 the information that can be inferred about a complex relational system from the locally available visual information. As described by Hillier (1996a), it represents "the relation between what cannot be seen and what is available".

ix. Every Friday and Saturday night, this Market is transformed into one of the most popular music stages in London. Electric Ballroom, viewed 15 January 2006, <http://electric-ballroom.co.uk>.

x. "Stasis": 1. *Path.* A stagnation or stoppage of the circulation of any of the fluids of the body, esp. of the blood in some part of the blood-vessels. 2. [Gr. $\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in sense 'faction, discord'.] Oxford English Dictionary online, Second Edition 1989, Oxford University Press 2006, viewed 17 April 2006, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.

xi. "Ad hoc": *v.*, to use *ad hoc* measures or contrivances, to improvise; so adhoc(k)ing *vbl. n.*; ad hoc-ery, the use of such measures; *ad hoc* principles or practice. Oxford English Dictionary online, Second Edition 1989, Oxford University Press 2006, viewed 20 May 2006, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.