

The Street [15] 2019 | UK | 94 mins

UK release date	29th November 2019
Director	Zed Nelson
Cinematography	Zed Nelson
Cast	Residents and workers in Hoxton Street, London – as themselves.

The pie-and-mash shop proprietor gazes out of his window at the craft beer store across the road. Outside the art gallery opening, a soup kitchen serves meals to locals in need. Billboards advertise new luxury apartments with concierge and gym while an old man beds down for the night under the footbridge. The baker closes after 150 years, while a media startup suggests sitting in a bathtub full of coloured balls to improve creativity.

The Street is a new documentary that captures the textbook contrasts of the shabby old East End and the new influx of hipsters, property speculators and entrepreneurs in the area. Filmed over four years in a single location – Hoxton Street in Hackney, a stone’s throw from Shoreditch – the film reflects a much wider picture. It is not just about gentrification, but all that feeds into it: history, economics, politics, urbanisation, immigration – how changes in national policy register on the human scale, decades later. It is Brexit Britain in microcosm.

Hoxton Street is a lively, fairly shabby market street, largely surrounded by housing estates. At one end the rising skyscrapers of the City close off the horizon; at the other the new residential high-rises that have sprung up. In between we meet a cross-section of local characters – some are comically “poncey” hipsters, admittedly, but most are ordinary folk: shop-owners, elderly council-flat tenants, estate agents, community and faith workers, rough sleepers. There is no Benefits Street-style editorialising; the director Zed Nelson, who is best known as a documentary photographer, listens to their views empathetically and records the visual minutiae of their lives with a keen eye.

Nelson’s work has chronicled gun culture in the US, the new nation of South Sudan and the global beauty industry, but in recent years his focus has been getting closer to home, he says. A lifelong Hackney resident, he first chronicled the borough’s contrasts in his 2012 photo series Hackney: A Tale of Two Cities.

Then, in August 2015, he decided to start documenting the area on video. He didn't know anyone; he just set up his camera and started filming, until someone started talking to him.

“Underpinning this was the idea that we were living in a time that was extraordinary,” he says. “There was a housing crisis in terms of unavailability of affordable housing, there's also a housing crisis for reasonably well-off, middle-class people who can no longer afford to buy homes, or people with property whose children can no longer afford to live near them. It seemed to be driving a type of gentrification that was very different than before – a sort of hyper-gentrification.”

It is not just a matter of perception. Average house prices in London have risen from less than £100,000 in 1990 to nearly £500,000 in 2015. Since the Thatcher government's Right to Buy policy in the 1980s, the number of council homes in Britain has fallen by nearly 70%. A decade of austerity cuts has reduced Hackney council's budget by 45%.

It is easy to see how locals feel “pushed out” from both ends: the boom in new, expensive properties feeds into the feeling of being left behind; public-housing shortages feed into resentment of immigrant families, who are perceived by some as “jumping the queue” for accommodation. All of which set the scene for Brexit.

After: **Steve Rose** – “A 50p cuppa and a £2m flat: how one London Street captures the divisions of Brexit”, *The Guardian*, 21 November 2019

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